







Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

*Alice Hastings
with the Author's love*

THE CLOVEN FOOT

1888.

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET'

ETC. ETC. ETC.

In Three Volumes

VOL. III.



LONDON

JOHN AND ROBERT MAXWELL

MILTON HOUSE, SHOE LANE, FLEET STREET

[All rights reserved]

CONTENTS TO VOL. III.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. WHY DON'T YOU TRUST ME ?	1
II. ON HIS DEFENCE	13
III. AT THE MORGUE	38
IV. GEORGE GERARD IN DANGER	50
V. ON A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY	71
VI. KERGABIOU'S WIFE	86
VII. THE TENANT FROM BEECHAMPTON	102
VIII. CELIA'S LOVERS	116
IX. ON SUSPICION	157
X. MR. LEOPOLD ASKS IRRELEVANT QUESTIONS	173
XI. MRS. EVITT MAKES A REVELATION	185
XII. THE UNDERTAKER'S EVIDENCE	220
XIII. AN OLD LADY'S DIARY	237
XIV. THREE WITNESSES	252
XV. THE HUNT FOR DESROLLES	259
EPILOGUE	281

THE CLOVEN FOOT.

CHAPTER I.

WHY DON'T YOU TRUST ME?

THAT winter Sabbath was a dreary day for John Treverton. He walked home almost in silence, Laura wondering at his thoughtfulness, and speculating anxiously upon the possible reasons for this sudden change in his mood. Had this friend of the Clares brought him bad news? Yet how could that be? Must it not rather be that this meeting with an old acquaintance had recalled some painful period in that past life of which she knew so little?

‘That is my misfortune,’ she thought. ‘I am

only half a wife while I am ignorant of all his old sorrows.'

She did not disturb her husband by questions of any kind, but walked quietly by his side through the wintry shrubberies, where the holly berries were gleaming in the mid-day sun, and the fearless robins fluttered from hawthorn to laurel.

'I won't come in to luncheon, dear,' said John when they came to the hall door. 'I feel a little dull and headachy, and I think it might do me good to lie down for an hour or two.'

'Shall I come and read you to sleep, Jack?'

'No, dear, I shall be better alone.'

'Oh, Jack, why are you not frank with me?' exclaimed his wife, piteously. 'I know there is something on your mind. Why don't you trust me?'

'Not yet, dear. You will know everything that can be known about me very soon, I dare say. But we need not anticipate the revelation. It will not be too pleasant for either of us.'

'Do you think that anything I can ever

learn about you will change me?' she asked, with her hand upon his arm, looking up at him intently. 'Have I not trusted you, and loved you, blindly?'

'Yes, dearest, blindly. But how can I tell how you may feel when your eyes are opened?'

She looked at him for some moments in silence, trying to read his face; and then, with most pathetic earnestness, she said,—

'John, if there is anything to be told to your discredit, if there is any act of your past life that you are ashamed to remember—ashamed to acknowledge,—an act known to others, for pity's sake let me hear it from you, and not from the lips of an enemy. Am I so severe a judge that you should fear to stand before me? Have I not been weakly fond, blindly trustful? Can you doubt my power to excuse and to pardon, where all the rest of mankind might be inexorable?'

'No,' he answered, quickly, 'I will not doubt you. No, dear love, it is not because I feared to trust you that I have tried to keep my

secret. I wished to spare you pain ; for I knew that it would pain you to know how low I had sunk before your influence, your love, came to lift me out of the slough into which I had fallen. But it seems the pain must come. Good and pure as you are, there are those who will not spare you that bitter knowledge. Yes, dear, it is best that you should learn the truth first from my lips. Whatever garbled version of this story may be told you afterwards, you shall have the truth from me.'

He put his arm round her, and they went up the broad old staircase side by side to the room that had been Jasper Treverton's study, and which Laura had beautified for her husband. Here they were secure from intrusion. John Treverton drew his wife's favourite chair to the fire, and sat down by her side, as they had sat on the night when Laura told her husband the story of Mr. Desrolles.

They sat for some minutes in silence, John Treverton looking at the fire, meditating how best to begin his confession.

Oh, Laura, I wonder whether you will hate me when you have heard what my past life was like ?' he said at last. 'I will not spare myself ; but even at this last moment I shrink from uttering the words that may destroy our happiness, and part us for ever. You shall be free to decide our fate. If when you have heard all, you should say to yourself, 'This man is unworthy of my love,' and if you should recoil from me—as you may—with disgust and abhorrence, I will bow my head to your decree, and disappear out of your life for ever.'

His wife turned her stricken face to him, pale as death.

'What crime have you committed, that you can think it possible that I should withdraw my love from you ?' she asked, with tremulous lips.

'I have committed no crime, Laura, but I have been suspected of the worst of crimes. Do you remember the story of a man whose name was bandied about in the newspapers nearly a year ago ; a man whose wife was murdered, and whom some of the London papers plainly denounced as the murderer ; the man called Chicot, whose disap-

pearance was one of the social mysteries of the year?’

‘Yes,’ she answered, looking at him wonderingly. ‘What can you have to do with that man?’

‘I am that man!’

‘You? You, John Treverton?’

‘I, John Treverton, *alias* Chicot.’

‘The husband of a stage dancer?’

‘Yes, Laura. There have been two loves in my life. First, my love for a woman who had nothing but her beauty to make her dear to the hearts of men. Secondly, my love for you, whose beauty is the lightest part in your power to win and keep my affection. My history may be briefly told. I began life in a cavalry regiment, with a small fortune in shares and stocks. These were so handy to get rid of, that before I had been five years in the army I had contrived to make away with my last sixpence. I had not been particularly dissipated or extravagant; I had not vied with my captain, who was the son of a West-end confectioner, and spent money like water; or with my colonel, who was a man of

rank, and £30,000 in debt; but I had kept good horses, and mixed in the best society, and the day I got my company saw me a beggar. There was nothing for it but to sell out, and I sold out; and being of a happy-go-lucky temperament, and tired of the confinement of country quarters, I crossed the Channel, and wandered over the loveliest half of Europe with a knapsack and a sketch-book. When I had spent the price of my commission I found myself in Paris, out at elbows, penniless, with a taste for literature and a facile pencil. I lived in a garret in the Quartier Latin, found friends in a thoroughly Bohemian set, and contrived to earn just enough to keep body and soul together. I began this life with the idea that I might one day win distinction in art. I had the will to work, and a good deal of ambition. But the young men among whom I lived, small journalists and hangers on at the minor theatres, soon taught me a different story. I learned to live as they lived, from hand to mouth. All higher aspirations died out of my mind. I became a hanger on at stage doors, a scribbler of newspaper paragraphs — a collaborateur in Palais

Royal farces—happy when I had the price of a dinner in my waistcoat pocket, and a decent coat on my back. It was at this stage of my career that I fell in love with Zaïre Chicot, a popular dancer at the theatre most affected by students in law and medicine. She was the handsomest woman I had ever seen. No one had a word to say against her character. She was not a lady; I knew that, even when I was most in love with her. But the vulgarities and ignorances that would have revolted me in an Englishwoman amused and even pleased me in this daughter of the people. She was fond of me, and I of her. We married without a thought of the future: with very little care even for the present. My wife—the popular dancer at a popular theatre—was so much the more important person of the two, that from the hour of my marriage I was known by her name—first, as La Chicot's husband; then as Jack Chicot, *tout court*. We were reasonably happy together, till my wife began to fall into those wretched habits of intemperance which finally blighted both our lives. God knows I did my best to cure her. I tried my

uttermost to hold her back from the dreary gulf into which she was descending. But I was powerless. No words of mine could ever tell you the misery—the degradation—of my life. I endured it. Perhaps I hardly knew the full measure of my wretchedness till the day on which I heard my cousin Jasper's will read, and knew the happiness which might have been mine had I been free from that hateful bondage.'

Laura sat by his side in silence, her face hidden in her hands, her head bowed down upon the cushion of the chair, crushed by the deep shame involved in her husband's confession.

'There is little more to tell. When I first saw and loved you I was La Chicot's husband—a man bound hand and foot. I had no right to come near you, yet I came. I had a vague, wicked hope that Fate would set me free somehow. Yet I tried, honestly, to do my duty to that unhappy woman. When her life was in peril I helped to nurse her. I bore patiently with her violent temper after she recovered. When the year was nearly gone it came into my mind

that my cousin's estate might be secured to you by a marriage which should fulfil the terms of his will without making me your husband save in name. And then, if in some happier day I should be released from my bonds, we could be married again—as we were.'

He paused, but there was no answer from Laura except a half-stifled sob.

'Laura, can you pity and pardon me? For God's sake say that I am not utterly despicable in your eyes.'

'Despicable? no!' she said, lifting up her tear-stained face, ashy pale, and drawn with pain, 'not despicable, John. You could never be that, in my eyes. But wrong, oh, so deeply wrong. See what shame and anguish you have brought upon both of us! What was Jasper Treverton's fortune worth to either of us that you should be guilty of a fraud in your endeavour to gain it for me?'

'A fraud?'

'Yes. Do you not see that our first marriage, being really no marriage, was an imposition and a sham—that neither you nor I have a right to a

sixpence of Jasper Treverton's money, or an acre of his land. All is forfeited to the hospital trusts. We have no right to live in this house. We possess nothing but my income. We can live upon that, Jack. I am not afraid to face poverty with you; but I will not live an hour under the weight of this shameful secret. Mr. Clare and Mr. Sampson must know the truth at once.'

Her husband was kneeling at her feet, looking up at her with a radiant face.

'My love, my dearest, you have made me too happy. You do not shrink from me—you do not abandon me. Poverty! no, Laura, I am not afraid of that. I have feared only the loss of your love. That has been my ever-present fear. That one great dread has sealed my lips.'

'You can never lose my love, dear. It was given to you without the power of recall. But if you want to regain my esteem you must act bravely and honourably. You must undo the wrong you have done.'

'We will hold a council to-night, Laura.

We will take Edward Clare's cards out of his hands.'

'What? Does Edward know?'

'He knows that I and Chicot are one.'

'Ah, then I can understand the look he gave you on the night of our first dinner-party—a look full of malignity. He had just been talking of Chicot.'

She shuddered as she pronounced a name associated with such unspeakable horror. And that name was her husband's; the man branded with the suspicion of a hideous crime was her husband.

'I am afraid Edward is your secret enemy,' she said, after a pause.

'I am sure he is—and I believe he is on the eve of becoming my open enemy. It will be a triumph in a small way for me to take the initiative, and resign the estate.'

CHAPTER II.

ON HIS DEFENCE.

A LETTER was brought to the Vicar just as he was sitting down to his five o'clock dinner that Sunday evening in the bosom of his family. The Vicar dined at five on Sundays, giving himself an hour for his dinner, and fifty minutes for repose after it, before he left home for the seven o'clock service. There were those among his congregation who affirmed that the tone of the Vicar's evening sermon depended very much upon his satisfaction with his dinner. If he dined well he took a pleasant view of human nature and human frailty, and was milder than Jeremy Taylor. If his dinner had been a failure the bitterest Calvinism was not severe enough for him.

'From the Manor House, sir,' said the parlourmaid. 'An answer waited for.'

‘Why do people bring me letters just as I am sitting down to my dinner?’ ejaculated the Vicar, pettishly. ‘From Treverton, too. What can he have to write about?’

Edward Clare looked up, with an eager face.

‘Wants to see me after church this evening—particular business,’ said the Vicar. ‘Tell Mr. Treverton’s man, yes, Susan. My compliments, and I’ll be at the Manor House before nine.’

Edward was mystified. Was John Treverton going to throw himself upon the Vicar’s mercy—to win that good easy man over to his cause—and persuade him to wink at the fraud upon the trusts under Jasper’s will? Edward had no opinion of his father’s wisdom, or his father’s strength of mind. The Vicar was so weakly fond of Laura.

‘I hate going out of an evening in such weather,’ said Mr. Clare, ‘but I suppose Treverton has something important to say, or he would hardly ask me to risk a bronchial attack.’

Tom Sampson, sitting by his comfortable fire-side, solacing himself for the Sabbath dulness

with a cup of strong tea and a dish of buttered toast, was also surprised by a letter from the Manor House, asking him to go there between eight and nine that evening.

“I am sorry to trouble you about business on Sunday, but this is a matter which will not keep,” wrote John Treverton.

‘I never did!’ exclaimed Eliza Sampson, when her brother had read the brief letter aloud.

Eliza was always protesting that she never did. This fragmentary phrase was her favourite expression of astonishment.

And then Miss Sampson began to speculate upon the probable nature of the business which required her brother’s presence at the Manor House. People who live in such a secluded village as Hazlehurst are very glad of anything to wonder about on a Sunday evening in winter.

At half-past eight precisely, Mr. Sampson presented himself at the Manor House, and was shown into the library. This room was rarely used, as Mr. and Mrs. Treverton kept all their favourite books elsewhere. Here, on these massive

oaken shelves, there was no literature that was not at least a century old. It was a repository for the genius of the dead. Travels, from Marco Polo to Captain Cook ; histories, from Herodotus to Mrs. Catherine Macaulay ; poetry, from Chaucer to Milton ; all bound in soberest brown calf, all with the dust of years thick upon their upper edges. It was a long, narrow room, with three tall windows, curtained with faded crimson cloth. It had an awful and almost judicial look on this Sunday evening, dimly lighted by a pair of moderator lamps on the centre table, making a focus of light in the middle of the room, and leaving the corners in darkness. There was a good fire in the wide old basket-shaped grate, and Tom Sampson sat beside it, waiting for his host to appear. Trimmer had told him that Mr. Treverton would be with him presently.

Presently seemed to mean half an hour, for the clock struck nine while Mr. Sampson still waited. Not having any inclination to dip into the literature of the past, he had allowed the fire to draw him to sleep, and was slumbering

placidly when the door opened and Trimmer announced Mr. Clare.

Tom Sampson started up, and rubbed his eyes, thinking for the moment that he had fallen asleep by the fire in his snugery, and that Eliza had come to call him to supper—supper being another of those solaces which Mr. Sampson required to beguile the dulness of Sunday leisure.

The Vicar was surprised to see Mr. Sampson, and Mr. Sampson was equally surprised to see the Vicar. They told each other how they had been summoned.

‘It must be something rather important,’ said Mr. Clare.

‘It must be something connected with the estate, or he would scarcely want you and me,’ said Sampson.

John Treverton and his wife entered the room together. Both were very pale, but Laura’s countenance wore a look of keen distress, which had no part in the expression of her husband’s face. Secure of his wife’s allegiance, he was ready to meet calamity, whatever shape it might assume.

‘Mr. Clare, Mr. Sampson, I have sent for you as the trustees under my cousin Jasper’s will,’ he began, when he had apologised to the lawyer for letting him wait so long, and had placed Laura in a chair near the fire.

‘That’s a misnomer,’ said Sampson. ‘Our trusts under Jasper Treverton’s will determined on your wedding day. We are only trustees to the settlement made for Miss Malcolm’s benefit, sixteen years ago, and to your wife’s marriage settlement.’

‘I have sent for you to tell you that I have been guilty of a fraud upon you, and upon this lady,’ answered John Treverton, in a steady voice.

He was going on with his self-denunciation, when the door opened, and Trimmer announced Mr. Edward Clare.

The young man came into the room quickly, looking round him with a swift, viperish glance. He was surprised to see Laura, still more surprised at the presence of Tom Sampson. He had expected to find his father and Treverton alone.

John Treverton looked at the intruder with undisguised irritation.

‘This is an unexpected pleasure,’ he said, ‘but perhaps when I tell you that your father and Mr. Sampson are here to discuss a business of some importance to me—and to them as my wife’s trustees—you’ll be kind enough to amuse yourself in the drawing-room until we’ve finished our conversation.’

‘I have come to speak to Mrs. Treverton. I have something to say to her which she ought to hear—which she must hear—and that without an hour’s delay,’ said Edward. ‘Accident has made me acquainted with a secret which concerns her and her welfare—and I am here to communicate it to her, and—in the first instance—to her alone. It will be for her to act upon that knowledge—for me to defer to her.’

‘If your secret concerns me, it must concern my husband also,’ said Laura, rising and taking her stand beside John Treverton. ‘Whatever touches my happiness must involve his. You can speak out, Edward. Possibly your fancied secret is no secret.’

‘What do you mean?’ stammered Edward, startled by her calm look and resolute tone.

‘Have you come to tell me that my husband, John Treverton, was for a short period of his life known by the name of Chicot?’

‘Yes, that, and much else,’ answered Edward, deeply mortified at finding himself forestalled.

‘You wish to tell me, perhaps, that he has been suspected of murder.’

‘So strongly suspected, and upon such evidence, that it will need all your wifely trustfulness to believe him innocent,’ retorted Edward, with a malignant sneer.

‘Yet I do believe in his innocence—I am as certain of it as I am that I myself am no murderess—and if the evidence against him were doubly strong, my trust in him would not fail,’ said Laura, facing the accuser proudly.

‘And now, Mr. Clare, since you find that your secret is everybody’s secret, and that my wife knows all you can tell her about me——’

‘Your wife,’ sneered Edward. ‘Yes, it is as well to call her by that name.’

‘She is my wife—bound to me as securely as the law and the church can bind her.’

‘ You had another wife living when you married her—unless you have been remarried since your first wife’s death——’

‘ We have been so married. My wife was never mine, save in name, until I was a free man,—free to claim her before God and the world.’

‘ Then your first marriage was a deliberate felony, and a deliberate fraud,’ cried Edward, ‘ a felony because it was a bigamous marriage, for which the law of the land could punish you, even now ; a fraud because by it you pretended to fulfil the conditions of your cousin’s will, when you were not in a position to comply with them.’

‘ Stop, Mr. Edward Clare,’ exclaimed Tom Sampson, whose quick perception had by this time made him master of the case, ‘ you are assuming a great deal more than you can sustain. You are going very much too fast. What evidence have you that my client’s first marriage was a legal one ? What evidence have you that he was ever married to Mademoiselle Chicot ? We know how very loosely tied such alliances are apt to be in that class of life.’

‘How do I know that he was married to her?’ echoed Edward. ‘Why, by his own admission.’

‘My client admits nothing,’ said Sampson with dignity.

‘He admits everything when he tells you that he was remarried to Miss Malcolm after Madame Chicot’s death. Had he known his first marriage with Miss Malcolm to be valid there would have been no occasion for a repetition of the ceremony.’

‘He may have erred from excess of caution,’ said Sampson.

‘John Treverton,’ said the Vicar, who had been looking from one speaker to the other, the facts of the case slowly dawning upon him, ‘this is very dreadful. Why is my son here as your accuser? What does it all mean?’

‘It means that I have been guilty of a great wrong,’ answered Treverton quietly, ‘and that I am ready to undo that wrong, so far as it lies in my power. But I cannot discuss this question in your son’s presence. He has entered this room to-night as my avowed enemy. To you—to Sampson—as the trustees under my cousin’s will, I am

prepared to speak with fullest confidence—as I have already spoken to my wife—but I have no confession to make to your son. I recognise no right of his to interfere in my affairs.’

‘No, Edward, really, this is no concern of yours,’ said the Vicar.

‘Is it not?’ cried his son, bitterly. ‘But for my discovery, but for the presence of George Gerard in the church to-day, do you suppose this virtuous gentleman would have made his confession to his wife or his wife’s trustees? He saw himself identified to-day by the doctor who attended his first wife, who knows the story of his late career under the *alias* of Chicot. Finding himself face to face with an inevitable discovery, Mr. Treverton very cleverly yields to the pressure of circumstances, and makes a clean breast of it. Had Gerard never appeared in Hazlehurst, this honourable gentleman would have gone on till doomsday, untroubled by any scruples of conscience.’

The Vicar looked at his son wonderingly. Was this a loyal regard for truth and justice, or was it the spirit of hatred and envy which moved the

youth so strongly? The good, easy-going Vicar, full of charity for all the world, except a bad cook, could not bring himself all in a moment to think evil of his son. Nor was he ready to believe John Treverton the vilest of sinners. Yet, here was John Treverton accused by the Vicar's own son of an unpardonable fraud, and suspected of the darkest crime.

'If you will tell your son to retire, we may discuss this business without prejudice or passion,' said John. 'But as long as he is present my lips are sealed.'

'I have no wish to remain a moment longer,' answered Edward. 'I hope Mrs. Treverton knows that I am ready to serve her with zeal and devotion, should she deign to demand my aid.'

'I know that you are my husband's enemy,' answered Laura, with freezing contempt, 'and that is all I know or care to know about you.'

'That's hard upon an old friend, Laura,' remonstrated the Vicar, as Edward left the room.

'Has he not dealt hardly by my husband?' answered Laura, with a stifled sob.

‘Now, let us try and look this business in the face,’ said Mr. Sampson, seating himself quietly at the table and taking out his note-book. ‘According to your confession, Mr. Treverton, you had a wife living at the date of your first marriage with Miss Malcolm, December the thirty-first of the year before last. We have nothing to do with your second marriage—except so far, of course, as the lady’s honour is concerned. That second marriage can’t touch the property. Now, I am sorry to tell you that if your marriage with the French dancer was a good marriage, you have no more right to be in this house, or to hold an acre of Jasper Treverton’s land, than the meanest hind in Hazlehurst.’

‘I am ready to deliver up all I hold, to-morrow. Let the hospital be founded. I acknowledge myself an impostor. Shameful as the act appears now that I contemplate it coldly, it seemed hardly a fraud when it first suggested itself to my mind. I saw a way of securing the estate to my cousin’s adopted daughter. I knew it had been his dearest wish that she should possess it. When I went through the

ceremony of marriage with Laura Malcolm in Hazlehurst Church, I had but the faintest hope of ever being really her husband. When I made the post-nuptial settlement which was to secure to her the full enjoyment of the estate, I had no hope of ever sharing that estate with her. On my honour, as a man and a gentleman, it was for this dear girl's sake I did these acts, and with no view to my own happiness or aggrandisement.'

Laura's hand had been in his all the time he was speaking. Its warm grasp at the close of this speech told him that he was believed.

'If you make these facts public, you beggar yourself and your wife,' said Sampson.

'No, we shall not be penniless,' exclaimed Laura. 'There will be my income left. It is not quite three hundred a year, but we can manage to live upon that, can't we, John?'

'I could live contentedly on a crust a day in the dingiest garret in Seven Dials, if you were with me,' answered her husband, in a low voice.

Mr. Clare was walking up and down the room in a state of suppressed excitement. The whole

business was too dreadful: he was hardly able to realise the enormity of the thing. This John Treverton was a scoundrel, and the estate must all go to found a hospital. Poor Laura must leave her luxurious home. The parish would be a heavy loser. It was sad, and troublesome, and altogether fraught with perplexity. And the Vicar had a cordial liking for this John Treverton.

‘What have you to say about the murder of that poor creature—your first wife?’ he exclaimed, presently, walking up to the hearth by which Treverton and Laura were standing.

‘Only that I know no more who killed her than you do,’ answered John Treverton. ‘I did a foolish thing, perhaps a cowardly thing, when I left the house that night, with the determination never to return to it; but if you could know how intolerable my old life had become to me you would hardly wonder that I took the first opportunity of getting away from it.’

‘We had better look at things from a business point of view,’ said Mr. Sampson. ‘We are not going to do anything in a hurry. There will

always be time enough for you to surrender the estate, Mr. Treverton, and to acknowledge yourself guilty of bigamy. But before you take such a step we may as well make ourselves sure of our facts. You married Mademoiselle Chicot in Paris?’

‘Yes, on the eighteenth of May, sixty-eight. We were married at the Mairie. There was no other ceremony.’

‘Under what name were you married?’

‘My own naturally. It was only afterwards that I got to be known by my wife’s name.’

‘Were you known to many people in Paris by your own name?’

‘To very few. I had written in the newspapers under a *nom de plume*,—my sketches at that time were all signed “Jack.” I was generally known as Jack, and after my marriage I became Jack Chicot.’

‘How much did you know of your wife’s antecedents?’

‘Very little, except that she had come to Paris from Auray, in Brittany, about five years

before I married her; that she lived respectably, although surrounded by much that was dis-respectable.'

'But of her life in Brittany you knew nothing?'

'I only knew what she told me. She was a fisherman's daughter, born and reared in extreme poverty. She had grown weary of the hard monotony of her life, and had come to Paris alone, and for the most part of the way on foot, to make her fortune. Auray is a long day's journey from Paris by rail. It took her nearly a month to travel the distance.'

'That is all you know?'

'Positively all.'

'Then you cannot know that she was free to contract a marriage—and you cannot know that you were legally married to her?' said Tom Sampson, triumphantly.

His interests as well as his client's were at stake, and he was determined to make a hard fight for them. His stewardship was worth a good five hundred a year. If the estate came to be handed over for the establishment and main-

tenance of a hospital he would in all probability lose his position of land steward and collector of rents. Some officious committee would oust him from his post. His trusteeship would bring him nothing but trouble.

‘That is a curious way of looking at the question,’ said Treverton, thoughtfully.

‘It is the only right way. Why should any man be in a hurry to prove himself guilty of felony? How do you know that Mademoiselle Chicot did not leave a husband behind her at Auray? It may have been to escape from his ill-treatment that she came to Paris. That was a desperate step for a young woman to take—a month’s journey through a strange country, alone, and on foot.

‘She was so young,’ said Treverton.

‘Not too young to have married foolishly.’

‘What would you advise me to do?’

‘I’ll tell you to-morrow, when I’ve had time to think the matter over. I can tell you in the meantime what I would advise you not to do.’

‘What is that?’

‘Don’t surrender your estate till you—and we,

as your wife's trustees,—are thoroughly convinced that you have no right to hold it. Mr. Clare, I must ask you, as my co-trustee to Mrs. Treverton's marriage settlement, to be silent as to the whole of the facts that have become known to us to-night, and to request your son also to keep his knowledge to himself.'

'My son can have no motive for injuring Mr. and Mrs. Treverton,' said the Vicar.

'Of course not,' replied Sampson ; 'yet I thought his manner this evening was somewhat vindictive.'

'I believe he was only moved by his regard for Laura,' answered the Vicar. 'He took up the matter warmly because he considered that she had been deeply injured. I can but think so too, and I do not wonder that my son should feel indignant. As to the legal bearing of the case, Mr. Sampson, I leave you to judge that, and to deal with that as you best may for the interests of your client. But as to its moral aspect, I should do less than my duty as a minister of the Gospel if I were not to declare that Mr. Treverton has been guilty of a sin which can only be atoned by deep and

honest repentance. I will say no more than that now. Good-night, Treverton. Good-night, Laura.'

He took her in his arms and kissed her with fatherly affection. 'Keep up your courage, my poor girl,' he said, in a low voice. 'I wish your husband well out of his difficulties, for your sake. Will you come home to the Vicarage with me, and talk over your troubles with Celia? It might be a relief to you.'

'Leave my husband!' exclaimed Laura. 'Leave him in grief and trouble! How could you think me capable of such a thing?' And then she drew the Vicar aside, and, in a tremulous voice, which was little more than a whisper, said to him, 'Dear Mr. Clare, try not to think evil of my husband, for my sake. I know that he has sinned; but he has been sorely tempted. He could not judge the extent of the wrong he was doing. Tell me that you do not suspect him as he has been suspected; that you are not influenced by Edward's cruel words. You do not believe that he killed his wife?'

No, my dear,' answered the Vicar, decidedly.

‘First and foremost he is a Treverton, and comes of a stock I love and honour; and, secondly, I have lived in friendship with him for the last six months; and I don’t think I’m such a fool that I could live so long upon intimate terms with a murderer and not find him out. No, my dear, I believe your husband has been weak and guilty: but I do not believe—I never will believe—that he has been a cold-blooded assassin.’

‘God bless you for those words,’ said Laura, as the Vicar left her.

‘If Mrs. Treverton will go to bed and get a little rest after all this agitation, I shall be glad of some further conversation with you before I go home,’ said Sampson, when the door had closed upon Mr. Clare.

Laura assented, turning her white, weary face to her husband, with a look full of trust and love, as he went with her to the bottom of the staircase.

‘God bless and keep you, love,’ he whispered. ‘You have shown me the way out of all my difficulties. I can afford to lose everything except your affection.’

He went back to Tom Sampson, who was scribbling in his note-book, in a brown study.

‘Now, Sampson, we are alone. What have you to say to me?’

‘A great deal. You’ve got yourself into a pretty fix. Why didn’t you trust me from the beginning? What’s the use of a man having a lawyer if he keeps his affairs dark?’

‘We won’t go into that question now,’ said John Treverton. ‘I want your advice about the future, not your lamentations over the past. What do you recommend me to do?’

‘Get away from this place to-night, on the best horse in your stable. Take the first train at the furthest station you can reach by daybreak to-morrow. Let me see. It’s not much over thirty miles to Exeter. You might get to Exeter on a good horse.’

‘No doubt. But what would be gained by such a course?’

‘You would get out of the way before you could be arrested on suspicion of being concerned in your first wife’s murder.’

‘Who is going to arrest me?’

‘Edward Clare means mischief. I am sure of that. If he has not already given information to the police, depend upon it he will do so without delay.’

‘Let him,’ answered Treverton. ‘If he does, I must stand my ground. I got out of the way once; and I feel now that in so doing I committed the greatest mistake of my life. I am not going to fall into the same blunder again. If I am to be arrested—if I am to be tried for murder, I will face my position. Perhaps it would be the best thing that could happen to me, for a trial might elicit the truth.’

‘Well, perhaps you are right. Anything like running away would tell against you. But I recommend you to get to the other side of the channel without an hour’s loss of time. It is of vital importance for you to find out your first wife’s antecedents. If you could be fortunate enough to discover that she was a married woman when she left Auray, that she had a husband living at the time of your marriage——’

‘Why do you harp so upon that string?’ asked Treverton, impatiently.

‘Because it is the only string that can save your estate.’

‘I have no hope of such a thing.’

‘Will you go to Auray and hunt up your wife’s history? Will you let me go with you?’

‘I have no objection. A drowning man will cling to a straw. I may as well cling to that straw as to any other.’

‘Then we’ll start by the first train to-morrow. We’ll leave the place in the openest manner. You can tell people you are going to Paris on business; but, if young Clare does set the police on your track, I think they’ll find it hardish work to catch us.’

‘Yes, I’ll go to Auray,’ said John Treverton, frowning meditatively at the fire. ‘In my wife’s antecedents there may lie the clue to the secret of her miserable death. Revenge must have been the motive of that murder. Who was it whom she had so deeply injured, that nothing but her life could appease his wrath?’

‘Who, except a deserted husband or lover?’
urged Sampson.

‘Yet we lived together for two years in Paris, and no one ever assailed us.’

‘The husband, or lover, may have been out of the way—beyond seas, perhaps—a sailor, very likely. Auray is a seaport, isn’t it?’

‘Yes.’

It was agreed that they should start for Exeter by the seven o’clock train from Beechampton, catch the Exeter express for Southampton, and cross from Southampton to St. Malo by the steamer which sailed on Monday evening. From St. Malo to Auray would be only a few hours’ journey. They might reach Auray almost as soon as they could have reached Paris.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE MORGUE.

IT was midnight when John Treverton went upstairs to his study, where there were lighted candles, and a newly-replenished fire; for it was one of his habits to read or write late at night. This evening he was in no mood for sleep. He lifted the curtain that hung between the two rooms, and looked into the bedroom. Laura had sobbed herself to sleep. The disordered hair, the hand convulsively clasped upon the pillow, told how far from peace her thoughts had been when she sank into the slumber of mental exhaustion. John Treverton bent down and kissed the tear-stained cheek, and then turned from the bed with a sigh.

‘My sins have fallen heavily upon you, my poor girl,’ he said to himself, as he went back to his study and sat down by the fire to think

over his position, with all its perplexities and entanglements.

Sleep was out of the question. He could only sit and stare at the fire, and review his past life and its manifold follies.

How lightly had he flung away the treasure of liberty. Without a thought of the future he had bound himself to a woman for whom he had but the transient liking born of a young man's fancy—of whom he knew so little, that looking back now, he was unable to recall anything beyond the barest outline of her history. Well, he was paying dearly for that brief infatuation—he was paying a heavy forfeit for those careless days in which he had lived among men without principle, and had sunk almost to as low a level as his companions. He tried to remember anything that his wife had ever told him of her childhood and youth; but he could only remember that she had been very silent as to the past. Once, and once only, on a summer Sabbath night, when they two had been driving home alone together from a dinner

in the Bois, and when Zaïre's tongue had been loosened by champagne and curaçoa, she had talked of her journey to Paris; that long, lonely journey, during which she had so little money in her pocket that she could not even afford to give herself an occasional stage in a *diligence*, but had been content to get a gratuitous lift now and then in an empty wagon, or on the top of a load of buck-wheat. She told him how she had entered Paris faint and thirsty, white with dust from head to foot, as if she had come out of a flour-mill; and how the great city—with its myriad lamps and voices, and the thunder of its wheels—had made her dazed and giddy as she stood at the junction of two great boulevards, looking down the endless vista, where the lights dwindled to a point on the edge of the dark sky. She told him of her career in Paris—how she had begun as a laundress on the quay, and how one Sunday night at the Chateau des Fleurs a man had come up to her after one of the quadrilles—a fat man with a gray moustache and a large white waistcoat—and had asked her where she had learned to dance; and how she had told

him, laughingly, that she had never learned at all—that came naturally to her, like eating and drinking and sleeping—and then he had asked her whether she would like to be a dancer at one of the theatres, and wear a petticoat of golden tissue and white satin boots embroidered with gold—such as she might have seen in the last great spectacle of the Hind in the Wood—and she had told him yes, such a life would suit her exactly; whereupon the gentleman in the white waistcoat told her to present herself at eleven o'clock next morning at a certain big theatre on the Boulevard. She obeyed, saw the gentleman in his private room at the theatre, was engaged as one of a hundred and fifty figurantes, at a salary of twenty francs a week. ‘And from that to the time when I was the rage at the Students’ Theatre, it was easy,’ said La Chicot, with an insolent smile upon her full, red lips. ‘If I had any other man for my husband I should be the rage at one of the Boulevard Theatres, and the *Figaro* would have an article about me every other week.’

‘You have never had any fancy for going back

to Auray, to see your old friends?' asked the husband once, wondering at the cold egotism of the creature.

'I never had a friend in Brittany for whom I cared that,' answered Zaïre, snapping her fingers. 'Every one ill-treated me. My father was a perambulating cider-vat, my poor mother—well, I can pity her, because she was so miserable—whined and whimpered. It was a mercy to all of us when the good God took her.'

'And you never had anyone else to care for?' asked Jack, in a speculative mood. 'No lover, for instance?'

'Lover,' cried La Chicot, her great eyes flashing upon him angrily. 'What had I to do with a lover? I was but nineteen when I left that hole.'

'Lovers have been heard of even at that early age,' suggested Jack, in his quietest tone; and after that his wife said no more about her past history.

To-night, sitting in idle despondency, looking into the fire, John Treverton, master of Hazlehurst Manor, husband of a wife he adored, utterly dissociated from that reckless, happy-go-lucky Jack

Chicot of Bohemian surroundings, for whom the good and evil of each day had been all-sufficient, and who had never dared to look forward to the inevitable to-morrow, let his thoughts slip back to the bygone days, and saw, as in a picture, those scenes of the past which had impressed themselves most vividly upon his mind when they happened.

There was one incident in his married life which had made him wonder, for his wife had not been a woman of a sensitive temper, or easily moved to strong emotion, save when her own pleasure or her own interest was at stake. Yet in this particular instance, she had shown herself as susceptible to pity and terror as a girl of seventeen, fresh from a convent school.

They two, husband and wife, had been strolling one summer afternoon upon the quays and bridges, loitering to look at the traffic on the river, sitting to rest under the trees, or turning over the leaves of the old books upon the stalls, and so sauntering carelessly on till they came to the Pont Neuf.

‘Let us go across and look at Notre Dame,’

said the husband, for whom the old church had an inexhaustible charm.

‘Bah!’ cried the wife. ‘What a fancy you have for staring at old stones.’

They crossed the bridge, and sauntered to the front of the noble old cathedral, where already the hand of improvement was beginning to clear away the houses that surrounded and overshadowed its beauty. Jack Chicot was looking up at the glorious western door, built by Philip Augustus, thickly-wrought with *fleur-de-lys*, where in days of old had appeared the sculptured images of all the kings of Judah, shrined in niches of stonework, as delicate as lace or spring foliage. His wife’s eyes roved right and left, and all around, seeking some diversion for a mind prone to weariness, when not stimulated by amusement or dissipation,

‘See, my friend,’ she cried, suddenly, clutching her husband’s arm. ‘There is something! Look, what a crowd of people. Is it a procession or an accident?’

‘An accident, I think,’ answered Chicot, looking down the street facing them, along which a closely

packed crowd was hastening, rolling towards them like a mighty wave of black water. 'We had better get out of the way.'

'But, no,' cried the wife, eagerly. 'If there is something to see, let us see it. Life is not too full of distractions.'

'It may be something unpleasant,' suggested Jack. 'I am afraid they are carrying some poor creature to the Morgue.'

'That matters nothing. We may as well see.'

So they waited, and fell in among the hurrying crowd, and heard many voices discussing the thing that had happened, every voice offering a different version of the same ghastly story.

A man had been run over on the Boulevard—a sea-faring man from the provinces—knocked down by the horses of a huge wagon. The horses had kicked him, the wheels had gone over his body. 'He was dead when they picked him up,' said one. 'No, he spoke, and hardly seemed conscious he was hurt,' said another. 'He died while they were waiting for the *brancard* on which to carry him to the hospital,' said a third.

And now they were taking him to the Morgue, the famous dead-house of the city, down by the river yonder. He was being carried in the midst of that dense crowd, which had been gathering ever since the bearers started with their ghastly burden, from the Porte St. Denis, where the accident happened. He was there in the centre of that mass of human life, an awful figure, covered from head to foot, and hidden from all those curious eyes.

Jack and his wife were borne along with the rest, past the great cathedral, down by the river, to the doors of the dead-house.

Here they all came to a stop, no one was allowed to enter save the dead man and his bearers, and three or four *sergents de ville*.

‘We must wait till they have made his toilet,’ said La Chicot to her husband, ‘and then we can go in and see him.’

‘What!’ cried Jack, ‘surely you would not wish to look at a piece of shattered humanity. He must be a dreadful sight, poor creature.’

‘On the contrary, monsieur,’ said some one near them in the crowd. ‘The poor man’s face was

not injured. He is a handsome fellow, tanned by the sun, a sea-faring man, a fine fellow.'

'Let's go in and see him,' urged La Chicot, and when La Chicot wanted to do a thing she always did it.

So they waited amongst the crowd, close packed still, though about two-thirds of the people had dropped off and gone back to their business or their pleasure; not because they shrank from looking upon death in its most awful aspect; but because the toilet might be long, and the spectacle was not worth the trouble of waiting a weary half hour in the summer sun.

La Chicot waited with a dogged patience which was a part of her character, when she had made up her mind about anything. Jack waited patiently, too; for he was watching the faces in the crowd, and had an artistic delight in studying these various specimens of a somewhat debased humanity. Thus the half-hour wore itself out, the doors were opened, and the crowd poured into the dead-house, just as it would have poured into a theatre or a circus.

There he lay, the new comer, with the summer

light shining on him, a calm figure behind a sheet of glass, a brave, bronzed face, bearded, with strongly-marked brows, and close-cropped black hair, gold rings in the ears, and on one bare arm, the arm which had escaped the waggon wheel, an inscription tatooed in purple and red.

Jack Chicot, after contemplating the dead man's face with curious interest, fixing the well-marked features in his mind, bent down to look at the tatooed device and inscription.

There were a ship, a rose, and these words, 'Dedicated to Saint Anne of Auray.'

The man was doubtless a native of Auray, La Chicot's birthplace.

Jack turned to remark this to his wife. She was standing close at his elbow, livid as the corpse behind the glass, her face convulsed, big tears rolling down her cheeks.

'Do you know him?' asked Jack. 'Is it any one you remember?'

'No, no!' she sobbed; 'but it is too dreadful. Take me away—take me out of this place, or I shall drop down in a fit.'

He hurried her out through the crowd, pushing his way into the open air.

‘You overrated your strength of nerve,’ he said, vexed at the folly which had exposed her to such a shock. ‘You should not have a fancy for such horrid sights.’

‘I shall be better presently,’ answered La Chicot. ‘It is nothing.’

She was not better presently. She was hysterical all the rest of the day, and at night had no sooner closed her eyes, than she started up from her pillow, sobbing violently, and holding her hands before her face.

‘Don’t let me see him!’ she cried, passionately. ‘Jack, why are you so cruel as to make me see him? You are holding me against the glass—you are forcing me to look at him. Take me away.’

Pondering to-night upon this strange scene of five years ago, John Treverton asked himself if there might not have been some kind of link between this man and Zaire Chicot.

CHAPTER IV.

GEORGE GERARD IN DANGER.

ALTHOUGH George Gerard had made up his mind to leave Beechampton by the first train on Monday morning, and although he began to feel doubtful as to the purity of Edward Clare's intentions, and altogether uncomfortable in the society of that young man, when Monday came and showed him a dark sky, and a world almost blotted out by rain, he yielded, more weakly than it was his nature to yield, to the friendly persuasion of Mrs. Clare and her daughter, who had come down to the breakfast room at an early hour, to pour out the departing guest's tea.

'You really must not travel on such a wretched morning,' said the Vicar's wife, with maternal kindness. 'I wouldn't let Edward start on a long journey in such weather.'

George Gerard thought of the discomforts of

a third class carriage, the currents of icy air creeping in at every crack, the incursion of damp passengers at every station, breathing frostily, and flapping their muddy garments against his knees, the streaming umbrellas in the corners, the all-pervading wretchedness: and then his thoughtful eyes roamed round the pretty, little breakfast room, where the furniture would hardly have fetched twenty pounds at an auction, but where the snugness and cosiness and homelike air were above price; and from the room he glanced at its occupants, Celia in her dark winter gown, of coarse blue serge, fitting to perfection, and set-off by the last fashion in collar and cuffs.

‘Why do you worry Mr. Gerard, mother?’ asked Celia, looking up from her tea-making. ‘Don’t you see that we are so horribly dull here, and he is so anxious to get away from us, that he would go through a much worse ordeal than a wet journey in order to make his escape.’

‘I almost wish you knew what a cruel speech that is, Miss Clare,’ said Gerard, looking down

at her with a grave smile from his station in front of the fire.

‘Why cruel?’

‘Because you unconsciously taunt me with my poverty. The eight or ten patients I ought to see to-morrow morning are worth a hundred pounds a year to me at most, and yet I can hardly venture to jeopardise that insignificant income.’

‘How you will look back and laugh at these days years hence, when you are being driven in your brougham from Savile-row to the railway station, to start for Windsor Castle, at the command of a telegram from royalty.’

‘Leaving royal telegrams and Windsor Castle out of the question, there is such a distance between my present abode and Savile-row that I doubt my ever being able to traverse it,’ said Gerard; ‘but in the meantime my few paying patients are of vital importance to me, and I have some rather critical cases among my poor people.’

‘Poor dear things, I am sure they can all wait,’

said Celia. 'Perhaps it will do them good to suspend their treatment for a day or two. Physic seems at best such a doubtful advantage.'

'I have a friend who looks after anything serious,' said Gerard, dubiously. 'If I were to follow my own inclination I should most assuredly stay.'

'Then follow it,' cried Celia. 'I always do. Mamma, give Mr. Gerard some bacon and potatoes, while I run and tell Peter to go to the George, and let them know that the omnibus need not call here.'

'I am afraid I am imposing upon your kind hospitality, and giving you a great deal of trouble,' said Gerard, when Celia had slipped out of the room to give her orders.

'You are giving us no trouble; and you must know that I should be happy to receive any friend of my son's.'

Gerard's sallow cheek flushed faintly at this speech. He felt that there was a kind of imposture in his position at the Vicarage. Every one insisted upon regarding him as an intimate friend of Edward Clare; and already it had been made clear to him

that Edward was a man whom he could never make his friend. But for Edward Clare's mother and sister he had a much more cordial feeling.

He sat down to breakfast with the two ladies. The Vicar would breakfast later, and one of Edward's privileges as a poet of the future was to lie in bed until ten o'clock every morning in the present. Never, perhaps, was a merrier breakfast eaten. Gerard, having made up his mind to stay, abandoned himself unreservedly to the pleasure of the moment. Celia questioned him about his life, and drew from him a lively description of some of the more curious incidents in his career. He had but rarely joined in the wilder amusements of his fellow students, but he had joined them often enough to see all that was strange and interesting in London life. Celia listened open-eyed, with rosy lips apart in wonder.

'Ah, that is what I call living,' she exclaimed. 'How different from our system of vegetation here. I'm sure if Harvey had lived all his life at Hazlehurst he would never have found out anything about the circulation of the blood. I don't believe ours does circulate.'

‘If you could only know how sweet your rural stagnation seems to a dweller in cities,’ said Gerard.

‘Let the dweller in cities try it for a month or six weeks,’ said Celia. ‘He will be weary enough by the end of that time ; unless he is one of those sporting creatures who are always happy as long as they can go about with a gun or a fishing rod murdering something.’

‘I should want neither gun nor rod,’ said Gerard. ‘I think I could find complete happiness among these hills.’

‘What, away from all your hospitals?’

‘I am speaking of my holiday life. I could not afford to live always away from the hospitals. I have to learn my profession.’

‘I thought you had done with all that when you passed your examination.’

‘A medical man has never done learning. Medical science is progressive. The tyro of to-day knows more than the adept of a century ago.’

As Mr. Gerard had only one day to spend at the Vicarage, Celia gave herself up to the task of making that one day agreeable to him, with the

utmost benevolence and amiability. Her brother seemed dull and morose, and shut himself in his den all day, upon the pretence of polishing a lyric he had flung off, in a moment of inspiration, for one of the magazines; so Celia had the visitor thrown altogether on her hands, as she complained afterwards rather plaintively, though she bore the infliction pretty cheerfully at the time.

The two young people spent the morning in conversation beside the breakfast-room fire, Celia pretending to work very hard at an antimacassar in crewels; while Gerard paced the room, and stared out of the window, and fidgeted on his chair, after the manner of a young man, not belonging to the tame cat species, when he finds himself shut up in a country house with a young woman. In spite of this restlessness, however, the surgeon seemed particularly well pleased with his idle morning. He found a great deal to talk about—people—places—books—life in the abstract—and, finally, his own youth and boyhood in particular. He told Celia much more than it was his habit to tell an acquaintance. Those blue eyes of hers expressed such

gentle sympathy: the pretty, pouting, under lip had a tender look that tempted him to trust her. As a physiognomist he was inclined to think well of Celia, despite her frivolity. As a young man he was inclined to admire her.

‘You must have had a very hard youth,’ she said compassionately, when he had given her a sketch, half sad, half humorous, of his life at the Marischal College, Aberdeen.

‘Yes, and I am likely to have a hard manhood,’ he answered gravely. ‘How can I ever dare ask a woman to share a life which has at present so little promise of sunshine?’

‘But do not all your great men begin in that kind of way?’ interrogated Celia; ‘Sir Astley Cooper, for instance, and that poor dear who found out the separate functions of the nerves that direct our thoughts and movements—though goodness knows what actual use that discovery could have been to anybody——’

‘I think you must mean Sir Charles Bell,’ suggested Gerard, rather disgusted at this flippant mention of genius.

‘I suppose I do,’ said Celia. ‘He wrote a book about hands, I believe. I only wish he had written a book about gloves; for your glove-maker’s idea of anatomy is simply absurd. I never yet could find a maker who understands my thumb.’

‘What an advantage my sex has over yours in that respect,’ remarked Gerard.

‘How so?’

‘We never need wear gloves, except when we dance or when we drive.’

‘Ah, sighed Celia, with her wondering look. ‘I suppose there are sane men in big places like London and Manchester, who walk about without gloves. They wouldn’t do it here, where everybody knows everybody else.’

‘I think I have bought about two pairs of gloves since I attained to man’s estate,’ said Gerard.

‘But your dances? How do you manage for those?’

‘Easily. I never dance.’

‘What, are you never tired of playing the wallflower? Do not German waltzes inspire you?’

‘I never go in the way of being inspired. I have never been to a party since I came to London.’

‘Good gracious! Why don’t you go to parties?’

‘I could give you fifty reasons, but perhaps one will do as well. Nobody ever asks me.’

‘Poor fellow!’ cried Celia, with intense compassion. Nothing he had told her of his early struggles had touched her like this. Here was the acme of desolation. ‘What, you live in London all the season, and nobody asks you to dances and things?’

‘In that part of London I inhabit there is no season. Life there runs on the same monotonous wheels all the year round—poverty all the year round—hard work all the year round—debt, and difficulty, and sickness, and sorrow all the year round.’

‘You are making my heart bleed,’ said Celia; ‘at least I suppose that’s anatomically impossible, and I ought not to mention such an absurdity to a doctor; but you are making me feel quite too unhappy.’

‘I should be sorry to do that,’ returned Gerard gently, ‘and it would be a very bad return for your kindness to me. Do not imagine that the kind of life I lead is a silent martyrdom. I am happy in my profession. I am getting on quite as fast as I ever expected to get on. I believe——yes, I do honestly believe, that I shall make name and fortune sooner or later, if I live long enough. It is only when I reflect how long it must be before I can conquer a position good enough for a wife to share, that I am inclined to feel impatient.’

Celia became suddenly interested in the shading of a vine leaf, and bent her face so low over her work, that a flood of crimson rushed into her cheeks, and she felt disinclined to look up again.

She gave a little, nervous cough presently, and, as Gerard was pacing the room in silence, felt herself constrained to say something.

‘I dare say the young lady to whom you are engaged will not mind how long she has to wait,’ Celia suggested; ‘or, if she is very brave, she will not shrink from sharing your early struggles.’

‘There is no such young lady in question,’ answered Gerard. ‘I am not engaged.’

‘I beg your pardon. Ah, I forgot you had said you didn’t go to parties.’

‘Do you think a man should choose a wife at a dance?’

‘I don’t know. Such things do happen at dances, don’t they?’

‘Possibly. For my own part, I would rather see my future wife at home, by her father’s fireside.’

‘Darning stockings,’ suggested Celia. ‘I believe that is the real test of feminine virtue. A woman may be allowed to play and sing; she may even speak a couple of modern languages; but her chief merit is supposed to lie in her ability to darn stockings and make a pudding. Now, Mr. Gerard, is not that the old-established idea of perfection in womankind?’

‘I believe that the darning and pudding-making are vaguely supposed to include all the domestic virtues. It may seem sordid in a lover to consider such details, but the happiness of a husband depends

somewhat upon his wife's housekeeping. Could any home be Eden in which the cook gave warning once a month, and the policeman eat up all the cold meat ?'

Celia laughed, but the laugh ended with a sigh. She had made up her mind that if ever she married her husband must be rich enough to be above the petty struggles of household economy, the cheese parings of a limited income. He must be able to keep at least a pony carriage, and the pony carriage must be perfect in all its appointments. A footman Celia might forego, but she must have the neatest of parlour-maids. She did not aspire to get her gowns from Worth : but she must not be circumscribed as to collars and cuffs, and must be able to employ the best dressmaker in Exeter or Plymouth.

But here was a young man who must wait for years before he could marry ; or must drag some poor young woman down into the dismal swamp of genteel poverty. Celia felt honestly sorry for him. Of all the men she had ever met he seemed to her the most manly, the brightest, the bravest—per-

haps altogether the best. If not exactly handsome, there was that in his marked features and vivid expression which Celia thought more attractive than absolute regularity of line, or splendour of colour.

Mrs. Clare had been absent all the morning, engaged in small domestic duties which she considered important, but which Celia described sweepingly as 'muddling.' She appeared by-and-bye at luncheon—a meal which the Vicar never ate, and entertained her guest with a dissertation on the tiresomeness of servants, and the various difficulties of housekeeping, until Edward—who honoured the family circle with his society while he refreshed his exhausted muse with cold roast beef and pickles—ruthlessly cut short his mother's sermonising, and entered upon a critical discussion with George Gerard as to the relative merits of Browning and Swinburne.

Celia was surprised to discover how widely the young surgeon had read. She had expected to find him ignorant of almost everything outside his own particular domain.

‘How can you find time for light literature?’ she asked.

‘Light literature is my only relaxation.’

‘You go to the theatres now and then, I suppose?’

‘I like to go when there is something good to be seen,’ answered Gerard, flushing at the recollection of the time when he had gone three nights a week to feast his eyes upon La Chicot’s florid loveliness.

He felt ashamed of an infatuation which at the time had seemed to him as noble as the Greek’s worship of abstract beauty.

By the time luncheon was finished the rain had ceased, and the gray, wintry sky, though sunless, looked no longer threatening.

‘Not a bad afternoon for a ramble on yonder moor,’ said Gerard, standing in the bay window, looking out at the landscape. ‘Would you have the courage to be my pioneer, Miss Clare?’

Celia looked at her brother, interrogatively.

‘I’m not in the humour for any more scribbling to-day,’ said Edward, ‘so perhaps a good long walk

would be the easiest way of getting rid of the afternoon. Put on your waterproof and clump soles, Celia, and show us the way.'

Celia ran off, delighted at the opportunity. A moorland ramble with a conversable young man was at least a novelty.

In the hall the damsel met her mother, and in a sudden overflow of spirits stopped to give her a filial hug.

'Let us have something nice for dinner, mother dear,' she pleaded. 'It's his last evening.'

The tone of the request inspired Mrs. Clare with vague fears. A girl could hardly have said more had the visitor been her plighted lover.

'What an idea!' she exclaimed, good-humouredly. 'Of course I shall do the best I can, but Monday is such an awkward day.'

'Of course, dear. We all know that, but don't let it be quite a Monday dinner,' urged Celia.

'As for that young man, I don't believe he knows what he is eating.'

'Heaven forbid that he should be like my father and his dinner the most important event

in his day!’ retorted Celia, whereat Mrs. Clare murmured mildly,—

‘My love, your father has a very peculiar constitution. There are things which he can eat, and things which he cannot eat.’

‘Of course, you dear deluded *mater*. Cold mutton is poisonous to his constitution; but I never heard of his being the worse for truffled turkey.’

And then Celia skipped off, to attire herself, not unbecomingly, in a dark gray Ulster, and the most impertinent of billycock hats.

The ramble on the moor was a success. Edward held himself aloof, and smoked his cigar in gloomy silence, but the two others were as merry as a brace of schoolboys taking a stolen holiday. They clambered the steepest paths, crossed the wildest bits of hill and hollow, narrowly escaped coming to grief in boggy ground, and laughed and talked with inexhaustible spirits all the time. George Gerard hardly knew himself, and was struck with wonder at finding that life could be so pleasant. The wintry air was fresh and clear, the wind whistled gaily over the vast sweep of undulating turf and heather. Just

at sunset there came a flood of yellow light over the low western sky; a farewell smile from a sun that had hidden himself all day.

‘Good gracious!’ cried Celia, ‘we shall barely have time to scamper home to dinner; and if there is one thing that irritates papa more than another, it is to wait five minutes for his dinner. He never waits more than five minutes. If he did, I believe lunacy would ensue before the tenth. You ought not to have led me astray so far, Mr. Gerard.’

‘I think it is you who have been leading me astray,’ said Gerard, half grave, half gay. ‘I never felt so far from my work-a-day self in my life. You have a great deal to answer for, Miss Clare.’

Celia blushed at the charge, but did not reply to it. She turned and surveyed the ground over which they had travelled.

‘I can’t see Edward anywhere,’ she exclaimed.

‘Do you know, I have an idea that he left us about an hour ago,’ said Gerard.

‘What a ridiculous young man! And now he will be home ever so long before us, and make capital out of his punctuality with my father.’

‘Could you imagine him capable of such meanness?’

‘He is a brother,’ answered Celia, ‘and in that capacity capable of anything. Come along, pray, Mr. Gerard. We must scamper home awfully fast.’

‘Won’t you take my arm?’ asked Gerard.

‘Walk arm in arm over the moor! That would be too ridiculous,’ exclaimed Celia, tripping on lightly over hillock and hollow. ‘Do make haste, Mr. Gerard, or we shall be lost in the darkness.’

George Gerard thought it would be rather nice to be benighted on the moor with Celia, or at any rate to go astray for an hour or so and lengthen their ramble. Happily, however, the lights of the village, glimmering in the valley below, were a safe guide to their footsteps, and Celia knew the pathway that descended the moor as well as she knew her father’s garden. The only peril was the risk of getting into some boggy patch of the common at the bottom of the moor, and even here Celia’s knowledge availed to keep them out of mischief. They arrived at the Vicarage

breathless, with glowing cheeks, just in time to make a hurried toilet for dinner.

Oh, how much too short that winter evening, though one of the longest in the year, seemed to George Gerard ! And yet its pleasures were of the simplest. Three of Celia's particular friends—the one eligible youth of Hazlehurst and his two sisters—dropped in to spend the evening, and the Vicarage drawing-room resounded with youthful voices and youthful laughter. Celia and the two young ladies played and sang ; and though neither playing nor singing was above the average young lady power, the voices were tuneful and fresh, and the fingers were equal to doing justice to a German waltz. The eligible young man was capable of joining in a glee, and George Gerard consented to try the bass part, and proved himself the possessor of a fine bass voice and a correct ear, so they asked each other, ‘ Who would o’er the downs so free ? ’ and they requested every one to ‘ See our oars with feathered spray,’ and they made valorous attempts at Bishop’s famous ‘ Stay, pr’ythee, stay,’ in which they did not break down

more than fifteen times, and they altogether enjoyed themselves immensely, while the Vicar read *John Bull* and the *Guardian* from end to end, and good Mrs. Clare nodded comfortably over a crochet comforter, giving her ivory hook a vague dig into the woolly mass every now and then, with an idea that she was working diligently.

Edward sat aloof reading Browning's *Paracelsus*, and hardly understanding a word he read. His mind was full of perplexity, and darkest thoughts were brooding there.

Thus the evening ran its course, till the appearance of a tray of sandwiches and a tankard of claret negus warned the revellers that it was time to disperse. The church clock chimed the half-hour after eleven as George Gerard went up to his room.

‘And to-morrow night I shall be alone in my Cibber-street parlour,’ he said to himself, ‘and I may never see Celia Clare again. Better so, perhaps. What should a piece of pretty frivolity like that have to do in so hard a life as mine?’

CHAPTER V.

ON A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY.

AFTER pitching and tossing all night in a manner painfully suggestive of shipwreck, John Treverton and his faithful solicitor arrived at St. Malo early in the afternoon, where the comforts and luxuries of that most comfortable hotel, the 'Franklin,' were peculiarly grateful after their cold and dreary passage.

There was no train to carry them to Auray that afternoon, so they dined snugly by a glorious wood fire in a private sitting-room, and discussed the difficulties and dangers of John Treverton's position over a bottle of Chambertin with the true violet bouquet.

Throughout this long conversation, Tom Sampson showed himself as shrewd as he was devoted. He seized the salient points of the case; fully measured all its difficulties; saw that sooner or later John

Treverton might be arrested on suspicion of his wife's murder, and would have to prove himself innocent. Sampson, as well as Treverton, had seen how much malice there was in Edward Clare's mind, and both foresaw the probability of that malice being pushed still further.

'If we could only prove that your first marriage was invalid, we should get rid at once of any motive on your part for the murder,' said Sampson.

'You could not prove that I knew my first marriage to be invalid,' answered Treverton, 'unless you are going to try to prove a lie.'

'I don't know what I might not try to do, if your neck were in danger,' retorted Sampson. 'I shouldn't stick at trifles, you may depend upon it. The grand thing will be to find out if there was a previous marriage. After your story about the sailor at the Morgue, I am inclined to hope for success.'

'Are you? Poor Sampson! I strongly suspect we are going in search of a mare's nest.'

They left St. Malo next morning, and arrived at Auray early in the afternoon. They were jolted

down a long boulevard from the station to the town in an omnibus, which finally deposited them at the Pavillon d'en haut, a very comfortable hotel where they were received by a smiling landlady, and a pretty chambermaid in a neat black gown, trimmed with velvet, a cambric cap as quaint as a nun's headgear, and apron, collar, and cuffs of the same spotless fabric.

As Tom Sampson's knowledge of the French language was that of the average British schoolboy, he naturally found himself unable to understand the natives of an obscure port in Brittany. He was with his client in the capacity of adviser; but it behoved his client to do all the work.

'Well, my dear fellow,' said Treverton, when they had deposited their travelling bags at the hotel, and were standing in the empty market-place, looking round them somewhat vaguely, 'here we are, and what is to be our first move now we are here?'

'I should think about the best plan would be to go to the churches and examine the registers,' suggested Sampson. 'I suppose you know your first wife's real name?'

‘Not unless it was Chicot—I married her under that name.’

‘Chicot,’ repeated Sampson, dubiously. ‘It sounds rather barbarous, but it’s nothing to the names over the shops here. I never saw such crack-jaw cognomens. Well, we’d better go and look up all the registers for the name of Chicot.’

‘That would be slow work,’ said Treverton, thinking of the sweet young wife at home, full of fear and trouble, left to brood upon her sorrows at that very time when life ought to have been made bright and happy for her, a time when her mind might be most prone to despondency.

He had written Laura a consoling letter from St. Malo, affecting hopefulness he did not feel: but he knew how poor a consolation any letter must be, and he was longing to finish his business and turn his face homewards.

‘Can you suggest a quicker way?’ asked Sampson.

‘I think it might be a better plan to find out the oldest priest in the parish, and question

him. A priest in such a place as this ought to be a living chronicle of the lives of its inhabitants.'

'Not half a bad idea,' said Sampson, approvingly. 'The sooner you find your priest the better, say I.'

'Come along, then,' said Treverton, and they went up the steps of a church near at hand, and into the dusky aisle, where a few scattered old women were kneeling in the winter gloom, and where the sanctuary lamp shone like a red star in the distance.

'What would they say at Hazlehurst if they could see me in a Roman Catholic church?' thought Sampson. 'They'd give me over for lost.'

John Treverton walked softly round the church, till he met with a priest who was just shutting up his confessional, preparatory to departure. He was a youngish man, with a good-natured countenance, and acknowledged the stranger's salutation with a friendly smile. John Treverton followed him out of the church before he ventured

to ask for the information he wanted, and then he explained himself as briefly as possible.

‘I have come from England to obtain information about a native of this town,’ he said. ‘Do you think that among the priests connected with your church there is any gentleman who can remember the events of the last twenty years, and who would be obliging enough to answer my questions?’

‘Most certainly, monsieur, since I apprehend your inquiries are to a good end.’

‘I can give you my own word for that. This gentleman is my solicitor, and if he could speak French, or if you could speak English, he would be able to vouch for my respectability. Unhappily he cannot put half a dozen words together in your charming language. At least I’m afraid he can’t.—Do you think you could tell this gentleman who I am, Sampson?’ John Treverton asked, turning to his ally.

Mr. Sampson became furiously red in the face, and blew out his cheeks like a turkey-cock.

‘Mon ami, monsieur,’ he began with a desperate

plunge. 'Er, mon ami est bien riche homme, bien à faire, le plus fort riche homme dans notre part de la campagne. Il a un grand état, très-grand. Je suis son lawyer—comprenney, monsieur?—son avocat.'

The priest expressed himself deeply convinced of the honourable position of both travellers, though he was inwardly at a loss to understand why a man should go wandering about the country with his advocate.

He then went on to tell John Treverton that his superior, Father le Mescam, the curé of the parish, had been attached to that church for the last thirty years, and could doubtless recall every event of importance that had happened in the town during that period. He was likely to know much of the private history of his congregation; and as he was the most amiable of men, he would doubtless be willing to communicate anything which a stranger could have the right to know.

'Sir, you are most obliging,' said John Treverton. 'Extend your courtesy still further, and bring Father le Mescam to dine with me and my friend at six

o'clock this evening, and you will weigh me down with obligations.'

'You are very kind, sir,' murmured the priest. 'We have vespers at five—yes, at six we shall be free. I shall feel much pleasure in persuading Father le Mescam to accept your very gracious invitation.'

'A thousand thanks. I consider it settled. We are staying at the Pavillon d'en haut, where I suppose that if a man cannot *dine*, he can at least eat.'

'Sir, I take it upon myself to answer for the hotel. As a type of the provincial cuisine the Pavillon d'en haut will prove itself worthy of your praise. You shall not be discontented with your dinner. I pledge myself to that. Till six o'clock, sir.'

The *Vicaire* lifted his biretta, and left them.

'It will go hard if I cannot find out something about my wife's antecedents from a man who has lived thirty years in Auray,' said John Treverton, as he and his companion walked down the narrow stony street leading to the river. 'So

beautiful a woman must have been remarkable in a place like this.'

'Judging from the specimens of female loveliness I have met with so far, I should say very remarkable,' retorted Sampson; 'for, with the exception of that pretty chambermaid at the Pavillong dong Haw, I haven't seen a decent-looking woman since we left Saint Mallow.'

They went down to the bridge, Sampson hobbling over the stony pathway, and vehemently abusing the vestry and local board of Auray, which settlement he appeared to think was governed exactly after the manner of our English country towns.

They crossed the bridge and went to look at an old church on the other side of the river, where the fisher folk had hung models of three-masters and screw steamers as votary offerings to their guardian saints; then they re-crossed the bridge and went up to an observatory on a hill above the little town, and surveyed as much as they could see of the landscape in the gathering winter gloom; and then Mr. Sampson, who might possibly have

been impressed by Vesuvius in a state of eruption, but who had not a keen eye for the quaint and picturesque on a small scale, proposed that they should go back to their hotel and make themselves comfortable for dinner.

‘I should like a wash if there’s such a thing as a cake of soap in the place,’ said the lawyer, ‘but from the appearance of the inhabitants I should rather suspect there wasn’t. Soap would be a mockery for some of them. Nothing less than scraping would be any real benefit.’

They found their sitting-room at the hotel bright with wax candles and a wood fire. Mr. Sampson nearly came to grief upon the beeswaxed floor, and protested against polished floors as a remnant of barbarism. Otherwise he found things more civilized than he had expected, never before having trusted himself across the Channel, and being strictly insular in his conception of foreign manners and customs.

‘I should hope the old gentleman who is to dine with us can speak English,’ he said; ‘he ought at his time of life.’

‘But if he has lived all his life at Auray?’

‘Well, no doubt this is a sink of ignorance,’ asserted Sampson. ‘I dare say the stupid old man won’t be able to understand a word I say.’

The two priests were announced as the great clock in the market-place struck six, town time, while the clock on the mantelpiece followed with its shriller chime. ‘Father le Mescam, Father Gedain,’ said the pretty chambermaid in most respectful tones, and thereupon the two gentlemen entered, neatly dressed, clean shaven, smiling, and having nothing of that dark and sinister air which Tom Sampson expected to discover in every Popish priest.

Father le Mescam was a little old man, with a quaint, comical face, which would have done admirably for the first grave-digger in ‘Hamlet;’ small twinkling eyes, full of sly humour; a mobile mouth, and a pert little nose, cocked up in the air, as if in good-humoured contempt at the folly of human nature in general.

‘I am extremely obliged to you for the kindness of this visit, Father le Mescam,’ said John Trever-

ton, when the *Vicaire* had presented him to his superior.

‘My dear sir, when a pleasant-mannered traveller asks me to dinner, I am only too glad to accept the invitation,’ answered the priest, heartily. ‘A whiff of air from the outside world gives an agreeable flavour to life in this quiet little corner of the universe.’

‘Lord have mercy on us, how fast the old chap talks!’ exclaimed Sampson, inwardly. ‘Thank goodness we Englishmen never gabble like that.’

And then, determined not to be left altogether out of the conversation, Mr. Sampson pulled himself together for a bold attempt. He gazed benignantly at Father le Mescam, and shouted at the top of his voice,—

‘*Fraw, Mossoo, horriblemony fraw.*’

The little priest smiled blandly, but shrugged his shoulders with serio-comic helplessness.

‘*Non moing c’est saisonable temps pour le temp de l’ong,*’ pursued Sampson, waxing bolder, and feeling as if all the French he had acquired in his school days was pouring in upon him like a flood of light.

Father le Mescam still looked dubious.

‘Well,’ exclaimed Sampson, turning to John Treverton, ‘I’ve always heard that Frenchmen were slow at learning foreign languages; but I could not have believed they’d be so disgustingly stupid as not to understand their own. Upon my word, Treverton, I don’t see any reason why you should explode in that fashion,’ he remonstrated, as Treverton fell back in his chair in a fit of irrepressible laughter. ‘Allong,’ cried Sampson. ‘Voyci le pottage; and I’m blessed if they haven’t emptied the bread basket into it!’ he exclaimed, contemplating with ineffable disgust the contents of the soup tureen, in which he beheld lumps of bread floating on the surface of a thin broth. ‘Venez donc, Treverton, si vous avez fini de faire un sot de voter même, nous pouvons aussi bien commencer.’

‘Mais, oui, monsieur,’ cried the curé, enchanted at understanding about two words of this last speech, and beaming at the Englishman in a paroxysm of good nature. ‘Oui, oui, oui, monsieur, commençons. commençons. C’est très bien dit.’

‘Ah,’ grunted Sampson, ‘the old idiot is inspired when one talks about his dinner. If that bread and waterish broth is a specimen of the kewsine of this hotel, I don’t think much of it,’ he added.

Poor as the soup was in appearance, Mr. Sampson found it was not amiss in flavour, and when a savoury preparation of some unknown fish had followed the soup tureen, and a fricassee of fowl and mushroom had replaced the fish, he began to feel at peace with the Pavillon d’en haut. A leg of mutton from the salt marshes completed his reconciliation to provincial cookery, and a dish of vanilla cream *à la Chateaubriand* raised his spirits to enthusiasm. The two priests enjoyed their dinner thoroughly, and chatted gaily as they ate, but it was not till the dessert had been handed round by the brisk serving maid, and a bottle of Pomard had been placed on the table, that John Treverton approached the serious business of the evening. He waited till the chambermaid had left the room, and then, wheeling his chair round to the fire, piled with chestnut logs,

invited Father le Mescam to do the same. Mr. Sampson and Father Gedain followed their example, and the four made a cosy circle round the hearth, each nursing his glass of red wine.

‘I am going to ask you a good many questions, Father le Mescam,’ began John Treverton. ‘I hope you won’t think me troublesome or impertinently inquisitive. However trivial my inquiries may seem, the result is a matter of life and death to me.

‘Ask what you will, sir,’ answered the curé. ‘So long as you ask no question which a priest ought not to answer, you may command me.’

CHAPTER VI.

KERGARIOU'S WIFE.

'FATHER le Mescam,' said John Treverton, 'do you ever remember hearing of a girl who left this town a laundress to become afterwards a celebrity in Paris, as a stage dancer?'

'I ought to remember her,' answered the curé, looking somewhat astonished at the question, 'for I baptized her; I prepared her for her first communion, poor soul; and I married her.'

John Treverton started from his chair, and then sat down again profoundly agitated. Sampson was right. Yes; there had been a previous marriage. Yet it might be too soon for exultation. The first husband might have died before La Chicot came to Paris.

'Are we talking of the same woman?' he asked; 'a girl who was known as Mademoiselle Chicot.'

'Yes,' answered Father le Mescam, 'that was

the only woman who ever left Auray to blossom into a stage dancer. Ours is not a soil which freely produces that kind of flower. I have good reason to remember that girl, for I was interested by her singular beauty, and I felt anxious for the safety of her soul amidst the snares and temptations to which such remarkable beauty is subject. I did my best to teach her—to fortify her against all future dangers; but she was as empty within as she was lovely without. I hardly know whether one ought to consider such a creature responsible for all her errors. Hers was a case of invincible ignorance. The church has to deal with many such characters—the heart hard as stone, the intellect a blank.'

'What's he jabbering about?' said Tom Sampson to his client. 'You look as if you had found out something.'

'Wait, my dear fellow. I am on the point of making a discovery. You were right in your guess, Sampson; there was a previous husband.'

'Of course,' cried Sampson, triumphantly. 'My surprise in the case of a woman of that kind

would be to discover only one previous husband. I should sooner expect to hear of six.'

'Hold your tongue,' said John Treverton, authoritatively, and then he refilled Father le Mescan's glass before he proceeded with his inquiry. 'You say you married La Chicot?'

'She was not La Chicot when I married her, but plain Marie Pomellec, the eldest daughter of a drunken old fisherman down by the quay. Drink was hereditary in her family. Grandfather and great-grandfather, they had all been drunkards from generation to generation. The children had to shift for themselves from the time they could run. I think that may have helped to make them hard and cruel, though some sweet souls educate themselves for heaven in just as hard a life. As Marie grew up to a fine tall slip of a girl her handsome face attracted notice. She got to know that she was the prettiest woman in Auray, and the knowledge soon spoiled whatever good there was in her. I saw all the perils of her position—dissolute parents—utter want of guidance from without—a mind too frivolous to

be a guide to itself. In my idea her only chance of salvation lay in an early marriage, and although she was but seventeen when Jean Kergariou asked her to be his wife, I did not hesitate in advising her to marry him.'

'Who was Kergariou?'

'A sailor, and as good a fellow as ever went to sea. He and Marie had been playfellows. They had attended the same class for instruction. Jean was intelligent, Marie was dull. Jean was frank and good-humoured, Marie was reserved and self-willed. But the poor fellow was dazzled by the girl's beauty, and she was endeared to him by old associations. He told me that she was the only woman he ever had cared for, the only woman he ever should care for. He had saved a little money and could afford to furnish one of the cottages in the street by the quay. He would have to go to sea, of course, and Marie would stop at home and keep house, and perhaps earn a little money by washing linen, having the river so convenient. I would rather have had a home-staying husband for her, but Jean was a thoroughly good fellow, and I

thought such a husband must keep her out of harm's way. He was not the kind of man that any woman could attempt to trifle with.'

'And he married her?'

'Yes, they were married in the church yonder, one Easter Monday.'

'Can you tell me the date?'

'I can find it for you in the book where such events are registered. I could not say at this moment how many years ago it may have been. I could tell you the year of poor Kergariou's death.'

'Oh, he is dead, then?' asked Treverton, with a dreadful sinking of the heart.

'Yes, poor fellow. Let me see; it must have been three years ago last summer that Kergariou met with his melancholy death.'

'His melancholy death,' repeated Treverton. 'Why melancholy?'

'He was killed—run over by a waggon, on the Boulevard St. Denis, in Paris.'

'Run over by a waggon, three summers ago, on the Boulevard,' echoed John Treverton. 'Yes, I recollect.'

‘What, you knew him?’

‘No, but I was in Paris at the time of the accident.’

John Treverton recalled that scene at the Morgue, and his wife’s ghastly face when she entreated him to take her away. Yes, that one page which had stood boldly out from the book of memory, with a lurid light upon it, was indeed a page of momentous meaning.

‘Tell me all about Jean Kergariou and his wife,’ he said to the curé. ‘It is a matter of vital importance for me to know. You are doing me a service which will make me grateful to you for the rest of my life.’

‘Not quite so long, I hope,’ retorted the priest, with a sly smile. ‘A man would be but short-lived if his life were to be measured by the endurance of his gratitude. That is a delightful virtue, but not a lasting one.’

‘Try me,’ exclaimed John Treverton. ‘Give me legal proof that Marie Pomellec and the dancer called Chicot were one, and that the man killed on the Boulevard three summers ago was Marie

Pomellec's husband, and you may put me to the hardest proof you choose, but you shall never find me ungrateful.'

'There are noble exceptions, doubtless,' said the priest, shrugging his shoulders, 'just as there is now and then a baby born with two heads. As for the story of Marie Pomellec and her marriage, it is simple enough, and common enough, and the proof of it is to be found in the registers at the Mairie, while the fact is known to all the inhabitants of the quay, where Jean's wife lived. That the man killed in Paris was Jean Kergariou is also certain; he was recognised by a fellow-sailor while he was lying in the Morgue, and the account appeared in several of the Paris newspapers under the heading of *Faits divers*. The only point open to question might be the identity of the dancer, Mademoiselle Chicot, with Kergariou's wife, but even that was pretty well known to several people in Auray, who saw the woman dance in Paris, and brought back the news of her success—to say nothing of her photographs, which are unmistakable.'

'How did Marie Kergariou come to leave Auray?'

‘ Who knows? Not I. What man can explain a woman’s caprice? She lived steadily enough for the first year after her marriage. Kergariou was away the greater part of the time, on board a whaler in Greenland. When he came home he and his pretty wife seemed monstrously fond of each other. But in the second year things were not so pleasant. Kergariou complained to me of his wife’s temper. Marie avoided the confessional, and grew lax in her attendance at the services of the church. The neighbours told me there were quarrels—neighbours will talk of each other, you see, sir, and a priest must not always shut his ears, for the more he knows of his parishioners the better he can help them. I had some serious talk with Marie, but found her sadly impenetrable. She complained of her hard life. She had to work as hard as the ugliest woman in Auray. I reminded her that the blessed Virgin, who was portrayed in all our churches as the highest type of human loveliness, had led a humble and toilsome life on earth, before she ascended to be the queen of heaven. Was beauty to give exception from toil and hard-

ship ! If she had been feeble and deformed, I told her, she might plead her infirmity as an excuse for idleness ; but God had given her health and strength, and she ought to be proud to think that her labour could help to keep a decent home for her husband, whose career was one of continual peril. I might as well have talked to a stone. Marie told me she was very sorry she had married a sailor. If she had waited a little she had no doubt she might have had a rich young farmer for her husband—a man who could have stayed at home and kept her company, and given her fine clothes to wear. When that year was half gone I heard that there had been a desperate quarrel between Kergariou and his wife the night before he left home for his Greenland voyage ; and before he had been gone a week Marie disappeared. At first there was an idea that she had made away with herself ; and some of the good-natured fisher folk, who had known her from childhood, set to work to drag the river. But when the neighbours came to examine her cottage they found that she had taken all her clothes, and the few trinkets that Jean had given her in his courting

days, and soon after that a waggoner told how he had met her on the road to Rennes ; and then every one knew that Kergariou's wife had run away because she was tired of her toilsome, honest life at Auray. She had let drop many a hint, it seemed, when she was washing linen among her companions down by the river ; and it was pretty clear to them all that she had gone to Paris to make her fortune, and that if she could not make it in a good way she would make it in a bad one. She was only nineteen years of age, but as old in perversity as if she had been fifty.'

'When did her husband come back ?'

'Not till late in the following year. He had been through all kinds of misfortune in the North Seas, and came back looking like the ghost of the fine handsome young fellow I had married two years before. When he found out what had happened he wanted to set out for Paris in search of his wife ; but he fell ill of fever and ague, and lay for months at a friend's house, between life and death. As soon as he was able to move about he went to Paris, and spent the remnant of his savings in hunting for

his wife, without success. She had not yet made herself notorious as a dancer, you must understand, and there were no photographs of her to be seen in the shops. She was only one among many foolish creatures, painting their faces, and dancing before the foolish crowd. Kergariou came back to Auray in despair, and then went off to the North Seas again, caring very little whether he ever returned to his native place any more. He did come back, however, after an absence of more than three years. By that time Marie Pomellec had become notorious in Paris, under the name of Zaire Chicot, and a Parisian photographer travelling through Brittany had left half a dozen of her photographs in Auray. They were to be seen at the bookseller's shop when Jean Kergariou came home from his last voyage, and no sooner did he comprehend what had happened than he started off again for Paris, on foot this time, for the poor fellow had spent all his money during his former search for his wife. He left Auray about the middle of June, and in the second week of July I read of his death in the *Moniteur Universel*, which a friend sends me every week from Orleans. Whether

he had found his wife or not, I never knew. No one ever heard any more about his fate than that he had reached Paris, and met his death there.'

'A melancholy end,' said John Treverton.

'Not more melancholy than that of his wife,' replied Father le Mescam, 'if there was any truth in a story I read last year, copied from an English newspaper. The poor creature seems to have been murdered by the man with whom she was living—possibly her husband.'

John Treverton's heart sank. Every one, even this unworldly old priest, looked upon the husband's guilt as a matter of course. And if his innocence should ever be put to the proof, how was he to prove it? It was much to have made this discovery about his first wife, and to know that his second marriage had been valid. He stood possessed of Jasper Treverton's estate without a shadow of fraud. Although guilty in intention he had been innocent in fact. But beyond this there remained that still darker peril, the possibility that he might have to stand in the dock, charged with La Chicot's murder.

The two priests helped to discuss a second bottle of Pomard, and then took their departure, after Father le Mescam had promised to introduce Mr. Treverton to a respectable notary, who would procure for him the legal evidence of Marie Pomellec's marriage. While this was being done at Auray, John Treverton and his companion would travel without loss of time to Paris, and there search out the details of Jean Kergariou's death and burial.

The appointment with the notary was made for nine o'clock next morning, so eager was John Treverton to push on the business.

'Well,' gasped Sampson, when the two priests had gone, 'if ever a man played patience on a monument for a long winter evening I think I am that individual. Now they've gone, perhaps you'll tell me what that ridiculous old Jack-in-the-box, Father le Whatshisname, has been saying to you. I never saw an old fellow gesticulate in such a frantic way. If I hadn't been bursting with curiosity I should have rather enjoyed the performance, as a piece of dumb show.'

John Treverton told his legal adviser the gist of all he had heard from the priest.

‘Didn’t I say so,’ exclaimed Sampson. ‘Didn’t I say that it was more than likely there was a former husband in the background? It was a desperate guess, of course, and I don’t know that I quite thought it when I made the suggestion. But anything was better than relinquishing the estate, as you would have been fool enough to do, if you hadn’t had a shrewdish young man for your legal adviser. One of those tip-top firms in the City would have gone straight off to take counsel’s opinion; and, before you knew where you were, you’d have been counselled and opinioned out of your property.’

Sampson was in a state of intense exultation at a result which he considered entirely due to his own acumen. He walked up and down the room, chuckling inwardly, in a burst of self-approval. His overstrung feelings at last sought relief in some kind of refreshment. He asked John Treverton to order him a glass of hot gin and water, and he was quite indignant when he was informed that the

Pavillon d'en haut could not furnish that truly British luxury.

'I dare say if I order you "a grog" you will get something in the shape of hot brandy and water,' said Treverton.

'Oh, pray don't do anything of the kind. Ask that black-eyed girl to bring a jug——Oh, here she is.'

And thereupon Mr. Sampson turned himself to the pretty waiting maid, gave a loud preliminary 'hem,' and thus addressed her—

'Mada-moyselle, voulez vous avez le bonty de—bringez—ong joug—ong too petty joug—O boyllong, prenez vous garde que c'est too boyllong, avec une demi pint de O di vi, et ong bassing de sooker, et, pardonnez, aussi ong quiller, n'oubliez pas le quiller.'" Here the girl's vacant stare arrested him, and he saw that no ray of British light could pierce an intellect of such Gallic density. 'Here Treverton,' he cried, impatiently. 'You tell her. The girl's a fool.'

John Treverton gave the order, and Mr Sampson had the pleasure of mixing for himself a strong jorum of thoroughly English brandy and water, and went to bed happy after drinking it.

As soon as the office was open next morning, John Treverton despatched the following telegram to his wife:—

‘Good news for you. All particulars to follow in to-day’s letter.’

At eleven, railroad time, Mr. Treverton and his lawyer were on their way to Rennes, *en route* for Paris.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TENANT FROM BEECHAMPTON.

WHILE John Treverton was in Paris, waiting to obtain proof of Jean Kergariou's identity with the sailor whose corpse he had seen carried to the Moigue, Laura was sitting alone in her husband's study, full of anxious thoughts. The telegram from Auray had been delivered at the Manor House early in the afternoon, and had given comfort to the weary heart of John Treverton's wife; but even this assurance of good news could not silence her fears. One horrible idea pursued her wherever she turned her thoughts, an ever-present source of terror. Her husband, the man for whom she would have given her life, had been suspected—even broadly accused—of murder. Let him go where he would, change his name and surroundings as often as he would, that hideous suspicion would follow him like his shadow. She

recalled much that she had read about La Chicot's murder in the daily papers. She remembered how even she herself had been impressed with an idea of the husband's guilt. Every circumstance had seemed to point at him. And who else was there to be suspected?

Strong in her faith in the man she loved, Laura Treverton was as fully convinced of her husband's innocence as if she had been by his side when he came home on the night of the murder, and stood aghast on the threshold of his wife's chamber, gazing at the horrid crimson stream that had slowly oozed from under the door, dreadful evidence of the deed that had been done. There was no doubt in her mind, no uncertainty in her thoughts: but she knew that as she had thought in the past, when she had read of the man called Chicot, so others would think in the future, if John Treverton, *alias* Chicot, were to stand at the bar accused of his wife's murder.

An awful possibility to face, alone, with the husband she loved far away, perhaps secretly watched and followed by the police, who might

distort his most innocent acts into new evidences of guilt.

‘If he were at home, here at my side, I should not suffer this agony,’ she thought. ‘It is here that he ought to be.’

Celia had been at the Manor House twice since Mr. Treverton’s departure, but on both occasions Laura had refused to see her, excusing herself on the ground that she was too ill to see any one. Edward Clare’s conduct had filled her mind with loathing and with fear. She had felt the hidden tooth of the cobra, and she knew that here was a foe whose hatred was fierce enough to mean death. She could not clasp hands with this man’s sister, kiss as they two had been wont to kiss. She could not confide in Celia’s sisterly love. Brother and sister were of the same blood. Could she be true when he was so profoundly false?

‘From this day forth I shall feel afraid of Celia,’ she told herself.

When the good-natured Vicar himself came on the day after the arrival of the telegram, anxious to comfort and cheer her in this period of distress,

Laura was not able to harden her heart against him, even though he was of the traitor's blood. She could not think evil of him, upon whose knees she had often sat in the early years of her happy life at Hazlehurst Manor; she could not believe that he was her husband's enemy. He had behaved with exemplary gentleness when John Treverton stood before him accused of falsehood and fraud. Even his rebuke had been full of mercy. He was not perhaps a high-minded man, nor even a large-minded man. There was very little of the Apostle about him, though he honestly tried to do his duty according to his lights. But he was a thoroughly good-hearted man, who would have gone a long way out of his straight path to avoid treading on those human worms over whose vile bodies a loftier type of Christian will sometimes tramp rather ruthlessly.

Laura feared no reproaches from this old friend in her hour of misery. He might be prosy, perhaps, and show himself incapable of grappling a difficulty; but he would shoot no barbed arrow of scorn or contumely against that wounded heart. She felt secure in the assurance of his compassion.

‘My dear, this is a very sad case,’ he said, after he had seated himself by her side, and patted her hand, and hummed and hawed gently for a minute or so. ‘You mustn’t be downhearted, my dear Laura; you mustn’t give way; but it really is a very sad affair; such complications—such difficulties on every side—one scarcely knows how to contemplate such a position. Imagine such a gentlemanly young fellow as John Treverton married to a French ballet dancer—a—French—dancer!’ repeated the Vicar, dwelling on the lady’s nationality, as if that deepened the degradation. ‘If my poor old friend could have known I am sure he would have made a very different will. He would have left everything to you, no doubt.’

‘Indeed, he would not,’ cried Laura, almost indignantly. ‘You forget that he had made a vow against that.’

‘My dear, a vow of that kind could have been evaded without being broken. My dear old friend would never have bequeathed his fortune to a young man capable of marrying a French opera-dancer.’

‘Why should we dwell upon that hateful mar-

riage?’ said Laura. ‘If—if—my husband was not free to marry me at the time of our first marriage—in Hazlehurst Church—we must surrender the estate. That is only common honesty. We are both quite willing to do it. You and Mr. Sampson have only to take up your trusts for the hospital.’

‘My dear, you talk as lightly of surrendering fourteen thousand a year as if it were nothing. You have no power to realise your loss. You have lived in this house ever since you can remember—mistress of all its comforts and luxuries. You have no idea what life is like on the outside of it.’

‘I know that I could live with my husband happily in any house, so long as we had clear consciences.’

‘My love, have you considered what a pittance your poor little income would be. Two hundred and sixty pounds a year for two people, at the present price of provisions; and one of the two an extravagant young man.’

‘My husband is not extravagant. He has known poverty, and can live on very little. Besides, he has talents, and will earn money. He is not

going to fold his hands, and bewail his loss of fortune.'

'My dearest Laura, I shudder at the thought of your facing life upon a pittance, you who have never known the want of money.'

'Dear Mr. Clare, you must think me very weak—cowardly even—if you suppose that I can fear to face a little poverty with the husband I love. I can bear anything except his disgrace.'

'My poor child, God grant you may be spared that bitter trial. If your husband is innocent of all part in his first wife's death, as you and I believe, let us hope that the world will never know him as the man who has been suspected of such an awful crime.'

'Your son knows,' said Laura.

'My son knows. Yes, Laura, but you cannot for a moment suppose that Edward would make any use of his knowledge against your interest. It was his regard for you that prompted him to the course he took last Sunday night.

'Is it regard for me that makes him hate my husband? Forgive me for speaking plainly,

dear Mr. Clare. You have been all goodness to me—always—ever since I can remember. My heart is full of affection for you and your kind wife: but I know that your son is my husband's enemy, and I tremble at the thought of his power to do us harm.'

The Vicar heard her with some apprehension. He, too, had perceived the malignity of Edward's feelings towards John Treverton. He ascribed the young man's malice to the jealousy of a rejected suitor; and he knew that from jealousy to hatred was but a step. But he could not believe that his son—his own flesh and blood—could be capable of doing a great wrong to a man who had never consciously injured him. That Edward should make any evil use of his knowledge of John Treverton's identity with the suspected Chicot was to the Vicar's mind incredible, nay, impossible.

'You have nothing to fear from Edward, my dear,' he said, gently patting the young wife's hand as it lay despondingly in his, 'make your mind easy on that score.'

'There is Mr. Gerard. He, too, knows my husband's secret.'

‘He, too, will respect it. No one can look in John Treverton’s face and believe him a murderer.’

‘No,’ cried Laura, naïvely; ‘those cruel people who wrote in the newspapers had never seen him.’

‘My dear Laura, you must not distress yourself about newspaper people. They are obliged to write about something. They could put themselves in a passion about the man in the moon if there were nobody else for them to abuse.’

Laura told the Vicar about the telegram received from Auray, with its promise of good news.

‘What can be better than that, my dear,’ he cried, delightedly. ‘And now I want you to come to the Vicarage with me. Celia is most anxious to have you there, as she says you won’t have her here.’

‘Does Celia know?’ Laura began to ask falteringly.

‘Not a syllable. Neither Celia nor her mother has any idea of what has happened. They know that Treverton is away, on business. That is all.’

‘Do you think Edward has said nothing?’

‘I am perfectly sure that Edward has been as

silent as the Sphinx. My wife would not have held her tongue about this sad business for five minutes, if she had had an inkling of it, or Celia either. They would have been exploding in notes of admiration, and would have pestered me to death with questions. No, my dear Laura, you may feel quite comfortable in coming to the Vicarage. Your husband's secret is only known to Edward and me.'

'You are very good,' said Laura gently, 'I know how kindly your invitation is meant. But I cannot leave home. John may come back at any hour. I am continually expecting him.'

'My poor child, is that reasonable? Think how far it is from here to Auray.'

'Think how fast he will travel, when once he is free to return.'

'Very well, Laura, you must have your own way. I'll send Celia to keep you company.'

'Please don't,' said Laura quickly. 'You know how fond I have always been of Celia—but just now I had rather be quite alone. She is so gay and light-hearted. I could hardly bear it. Don't

think me ungrateful, dear Mr. Clare ; but I would rather face my trouble alone.'

'I shall never think you anything but the most admirable of women,' answered the Vicar, 'and now put on your hat and walk as far as the gate with me. You are looking wretchedly pale.'

Laura obeyed, and walked through the grounds with her old friend. She had not been outside the house since her husband's departure, and the keen wintry air revived her jaded spirits. It was along this chestnut avenue that she and John Treverton had walked on that summer evening when he for the first time avowed his love. There was the good old tree beneath whose shading branches they had sealed the bond of an undying affection. How much of uncertainty, how much of sorrow, she had suffered since that thrilling moment, which had seemed the assurance of enduring happiness ! She walked by the Vicar's side in silence, thinking of that curious leavetaking with her lover, a year and a half ago.

'If he had only trusted me,' she thought, with the deepest regret. 'If he had only been frank

and straightforward, how much misery might have been saved to both of us. But he was sorely tempted. Can I blame him if he yielded too weakly to the temptation?’

She could not find it in her heart to blame him—though her nobler nature was full of scorn for falsehood—for it had been his love for her that made him weak, his desire to secure to her the possession of the house she loved that had made him false.

Half-way between the house and the road they met a stranger—a middle-aged man, of respectable appearance—a man who might be a clerk, or a builder’s foreman, a railway official in plain clothes, anything practical and business-like. He looked scrutinisingly at Laura as he approached, and then stopped short and addressed her, touching his hat:

‘I beg your pardon, madam, but may I ask if Mr. Treverton is at home?’

‘No; he is away from home.’

‘I’m sorry for that, as I’ve particular business with him. Will he be long away, do you think, madam?’

‘I expect him home daily,’ answered Laura. ‘Are you one of his tenants? I don’t remember to have seen you before.’

‘No, madam. But I am a tenant for all that. Mr. Treverton is ground landlord of a block of houses I own in Beechampton, and there is a question about drainage, and I can’t move a step without reference to him. I shall be very glad to have a few words with him as soon as possible. Drainage is a business that won’t wait, you see, sir,’ the man added, turning to the Vicar.

He was a man of peculiarly polite address, with something of old-fashioned ceremoniousness which rather pleased Mr. Clare.

‘I’m afraid you’ll have to wait till the end of the week,’ said the Vicar. ‘Mr. Treverton has left home upon important business, and I don’t think he can be back sooner than that.’

The stranger was too polite to press the matter further.

‘I thank you very much, sir,’ he said; ‘I must make it convenient to call again.’

‘You had better leave your name,’ said Laura,

‘and I will tell my husband of your visit directly he comes home.’

‘I thank you, madam, there is no occasion to trouble you with any message. I am staying with a friend in the village, and shall call directly I hear Mr. Treverton has returned.’

‘A very superior man,’ remarked the Vicar, when the stranger had raised his hat and walked on briskly enough to be speedily out of earshot. ‘The owner of some of those smart new shops in Beechampton High-street, no doubt. Odd that I should never have seen him before. I thought I knew every one in the town.’

It was a small thing, proving the nervous state into which Laura had been thrown by the troubles of the last few days. Even the appearance of this courteous stranger discomposed her and seemed a presage of evil.

CHAPTER VIII.

CELIA'S LOVERS.

THE day after Mr. Clare's visit brought Laura the expected letter from her husband, a long letter, telling her his adventures at Auray.

'So you see, dearest,' he wrote, after he had related all that Father le Mescam had told him, 'come what may, our position as regards my cousin Jasper's estate is secure. Malice cannot touch us there. From the hour I knelt beside you before the altar in Hazlehurst Church, I have been your husband. That unhappy Frenchwoman was never legally my wife. Whether she wilfully deceived me, or whether she had reasons of her own for supposing Jean Kergariou to be dead, I know not. It is quite possible that she honestly believed herself to be a widow. She might have heard that Kergariou had been lost at sea. Shipwreck and death are too common among those Breton sailors who go to the North Seas. The little seaports in

Brittany are populated with widows and orphans. I am quite willing to believe that poor Zaïre thought herself free to marry. This would account for her terrible agitation when she recognised her husband's body in the Morgue. And now, dear love, I shall but stay in Paris long enough to procure all documents necessary to prove Jean Kergariou's death; and then I shall hasten home to comfort my sweet wife, and to face any new trouble that may arise from Edward Clare's enmity. I feel that it is he only whom we have to fear in the future; and it will go hard if I am not equal to the struggle with so despicable a foe. The omnibus is waiting to take us to the station. God bless you, love, and reward you for your generous devotion to your unworthy husband.—JOHN TREVERTON.'

This letter brought unspeakable comfort to Laura's mind. The knowledge that her first marriage was valid was much. It was still more to know that her husband was exempted from the charge of having possessed himself of his cousin's estate by treachery and fraud. The moral wrong in his conduct was not lessened; but he had no

longer to fear the disgrace which must have attached to his resignation of the estate.

‘Dear old house, dear old home, thank God we shall never be driven from you!’ said Laura, looking round the study in which so many eventful scenes of her life had been passed, the room where she and John Treverton had first met.

While Laura was sitting by the fire with her husband’s letter in her hand, musing upon its contents, the door was suddenly flung open, and Celia rushed into the room and dropped on her knees by her friend’s chair.

‘Laura, what has come between us?’ she exclaimed. ‘Why do you shut me out of your heart? I know there is something wrong. I can see it in papa’s manner. Have I been so false a friend that you are afraid to trust me?’

The brightly earnest face was so full of warm and truthful feeling that Laura had not the heart to resent this impetuous intrusion. She had told Trimmer that she would see no one, but Celia had set Trimmer at defiance, and had insisted on coming unannounced to the study.

‘You are not false, Celia,’ Laura answered gravely, ‘but I have good reason to know that your brother is my husband’s enemy.’

‘Poor Edward,’ sighed Celia. ‘It’s very cruel of you to say such a thing, Laura. You know how devotedly he loved you, and what a blow your marriage was to him.’

‘Was it really, Celia? He did not take much trouble to avert the blow.’

‘You mean that he never proposed,’ said Celia. ‘My dear Laura, what would have been the use of his asking you to marry him when he was without the means of keeping a wife. It is quite as much as he can do to clothe himself decently by the uttermost exertion of his genius, though he is really second only to Swinburne, as you know. He has too much of the poetic temperament to face the horrors of poverty,’ concluded Celia, quoting her brother’s own account of himself.

‘I think a few poets—and some of the first quality—have faced those horrors, Celia.’

‘Because they were obliged, dear. They were in the quagmire, and couldn’t get out; like Chatterton

and Burns, and ever so many poor dears. But surely those were not of the highest order. Great poets are like Byron and Shelley. They require yachts and Italian villas, and thoroughbred horses, and Newfoundland dogs, and things,' said Celia, with conviction.

'Well, dearest, I bear Edward no ill-will for not having proposed to me, because if he had I could have only refused him; but don't you think there is an extremity of folly and weakness in his affecting to feel injured by my marrying someone else?'

'It isn't affectation,' protested Celia. 'It's reality. He does feel deeply, cruelly injured by your marriage with Mr. Treverton. You can't be angry with him, Laura, for a prejudice that results from his affection for you.'

'I am very angry with him for his unjust and unreasonable hatred of my husband. I believe, Celia, if you knew the extent of his enmity, you too, would feel indignant at such injustice.'

'I don't know anything, Laura, except that poor Edward is very unhappy. He mopes in his den all day, pretending to be hard at work; but I believe he sits brooding over the fire half the time

—and he smokes like——. I really can't find a comparison. Locomotives are nothing to him.'

'I am glad he is not without a conscience,' said Laura, gloomily.

'That means you are glad he is unhappy,' retorted Celia, "for it seems to me that the chief function of conscience is to make people miserable. Conscience never stops us when we are going to do anything wrong. It only torments us afterwards. But now don't let's talk any more about disagreeable things. Mother told me I was to do all I could to cheer and enliven you. She is quite anxious about you, thinking you will get low-spirited while your husband is away.'

'Life is not very bright for me without him, Celia; but I have had a cheering letter this morning, and I expect him home very soon, so I will be as hopeful as you like. Take off your hat and jacket, dear, and make up your mind to stay with me. I have been very bearish and ungrateful in shutting the door against my faithful little friend. I shall write your mother a few lines to say I am going to keep you till Saturday.'

‘You may, if you like,’ said Celia. ‘It won’t break my heart to be away from home for a day or two; though of course I fully concur with that drowsy old song about pleasures and palaces, and little dickey-birds and all that kind of thing.’

Celia threw off her hat, and slipped herself out of her sealskin jacket as gracefully as Lamia, the serpent woman, escaped from her scaly covering. Laura rang the bell for afternoon tea. The sky was darkening outside the window, the rooks were sailing westwards with a mighty clamour, and the shadows were gathering in the corners of the room. It was that hour in a winter afternoon when the firelight is pleasantest, the hearth cosiest, and when one thinks half regretfully that the days are lengthening, and that this friendly fireside season is passing away.

The tea table was drawn up to the hearth, and Celia poured out the tea. Laura had eaten nothing with any appetite since that fatal Sunday, but her heart was lighter this evening, and she sat back in her chair, restful and placid, sipping her tea, and enjoying the delicate home-made bread and butter.

Celia was unusually quiet during the next ten minutes.

‘You say your mother gave you particular instructions about being cheerful, Celia,’ said Laura, presently; ‘you are certainly not obeying her. I don’t think I ever knew you hold your tongue for ten consecutive minutes before this evening.’

‘Let’s talk,’ exclaimed Celia, jerking herself out of a reverie. ‘I’m ready.’

‘What shall we talk about?’

‘Well, if you wouldn’t object, I think I should like to talk about a young man.’

‘Celia!’

‘It sounds rather dreadful, doesn’t it?’ asked Celia, naïvely, ‘but, to tell you the truth, there’s nothing else that particularly interests me just now. I’ve had a young man on my mind for the last three days.’

Laura’s face grew graver. She sat looking at the fire for a minute or so in gloomy silence.

‘Mr. Gerard, I suppose?’ she said at last.

‘How did you guess?’

‘Very easily. There are only two eligible

young men in Hazlehurst, and you have told me a hundred times that you don't care about either of them. Mr. Gerard is the only stranger who has appeared at the Vicarage. You might easily arrange that as a syllogism.'

'Laura, do you think I am the kind of girl to marry a poor man?' asked Celia, with sudden intensity.

'I think it is a thing you are very likely to do; because you have always protested most vehemently that nothing could induce you to do it,' answered Laura, smiling at her friend's earnestness.

'Nothing could induce me,' said Celia.

'Really.'

'Except being desperately in love with a pauper.'

'What, Celia, has it gone so far already?'

'It has gone very far, as far as my heart. Oh, Laura, if you only knew how good he is, how bravely he has struggled, his cleverness and enthusiasm, his ardent love of his profession, you could not help admiring him. Upon my word, I think there is more genius in such a career as

his than in all Edward's poetic efforts. I feel quite sure that he will be a great man by-and-by, and that he will live in a beautiful house at the West end, and keep a carriage and pair.'

'Are you going to marry him on the strength of that conviction?'

'He has not even asked me yet; though I must say he was on the brink of a declaration ever so many times when we were on the moor. We had a long walk on the moor, you know, on Monday afternoon. Edward was supposed to be with us, but somehow we were alone most of the time. He is so modest, poor fellow, and he feels his poverty so keenly. He lives in a dingy street, in a dingy part of London. He is earning about a hundred and fifty pounds a year. His lodgings cost him thirty. Quite too dreadful to contemplate, isn't it, Laura, for a girl who is as particular as I am about collars and cuffs?'

'Very dreadful, my pet, if one considers elegance in dress and luxurious living as the chief good in life,' answered Laura.

'I don't consider them the chief good, dear,

but I think the want of them must be a great evil. And yet, I assure you, when that poor young fellow and I were rambling on the moor, I felt as if money were hardly worth consideration, and that I could endure the sharpest poverty with him. I felt lifted above the pettiness of life. I suppose it was the altitude we were at, and the purity of the air. But of course that was only a moment of enthusiasm.'

'I would not marry upon the strength of an enthusiastic moment, Celia, lest a lifelong repentance should follow. You can know so little of this Mr. Gerard. It is hardly possible you can care for him.'

"Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?"' quoted Celia, laughing. 'I am not quite so foolish as to love at first sight; but in three days I seemed to know Mr. Gerard as well as if we had been friends as many years.'

'Your brother and he are intimate friends, are they not?'

'I cannot make out the history of their friendship. Edward is disgustingly reserved about

Mr. Gerard, and I don't like to seem curious, for fear he should suppose I take too much interest in the young man.'

'Mr. Gerard has gone back to London, has he not?'

'Yes,' sighed Celia. 'He went early on Tuesday morning, by the parliamentary train. Fancy the Sir William Jenner of the future travelling by a horrid slow train, in a carriage like a cattle truck.'

'He will be amply rewarded by-and-by, if he is really the Jenner of the future.'

'Yes, but it's a long time to wait,' said Celia, dolefully.

'No doubt,' assented Laura, 'and the time would seem longer to the wife sitting at home by a shabby fireside.'

'Sitting,' echoed Celia; 'she would never be able to sit. She would have no time for moping over the fire. She would always be dusting or sweeping, or making a pudding, or sewing on buttons.'

'I think you had better abandon the idea,' said

Laura. 'You could never bear a life of deprivation. Your home-nest has been too soft and comfortable. You had much better think of Mr. Sampson, who admires you very sincerely, and who has a nice house and a good income.'

'A nice house !' exclaimed Celia, with unqualified contempt. 'The quintessence of middle-class commonness. I would rather endure George Gerard's shabby lodgings. A nice house ! Oh, Laura, how can you, living in these fine old rooms, call that stucco abomination of a modern villa, those dreadful walnut-wood chairs and sofas and chiffonier, all decorated with horrid wriggling scroll work, badly glued on ; that sticky-looking mahogany sideboard, those all-pervading crochet antimacassars——'

'My dearest, the antimacassars are not fixtures. You could do away with them. Indeed, I dare say if Mr. Sampson thought his furniture was the only obstacle to his happiness, he would not mind re-furnishing his house altogether.'

'His furniture the only obstacle,' echoed Celia, indignantly. 'What have you ever seen in my conduct or character, Laura, that can justify you in

supposing I could marry a stumpy little man, with sandy hair?’

‘In that case we will waive the marriage question altogether. You say you won’t marry Mr. Sampson, and I am sure you ought not to marry Mr. Gerard.’

‘There is no fear of my doing anything so foolish,’ Celia replied, with a resigned air. ‘He has gone back to London, and heaven knows if I shall ever see him again. But I am certain if you saw more of him, you would like him very much.’

Laura shuddered, remembering that it was by means of George Gerard that her husband had been identified with the missing Chicot. She could not have a very friendly feeling towards Mr. Gerard, knowing this, but she listened with admirable patience while Celia descanted upon the young man’s noble qualities, and repeated all he had said upon the moor, where he really seemed to have recited his entire biography for Celia’s edification.

Comforted by her husband’s letter, Laura was able to support Celia’s liveliness, and so the long winter evening wore itself away pleasantly enough. The next day was Saturday. Laura had calculated

that, if things went easily with him in Paris, it would be just possible for John Treverton to be home on Saturday night. This possibility kept her in a flutter all day. It was in vain that Celia proposed a drive to Beechampton, or a walk on the moor. Laura would not go a step beyond the gardens of the Manor House. She could not be persuaded even to go as far as the orchard, for there she could not have seen the fly that brought her husband to the door, and she had an ever-present expectation of his return.

‘Don’t you know that vulgar old proverb which says that “a watched pot never boils,” Laura?’ remonstrated Miss Clare. ‘Depend upon it, your husband will never come while you are worrying yourself about him. You should try to get him out of your thoughts.’

‘I can’t,’ answered Laura. ‘All my thoughts are of him. He is a part of my mind.’

Celia sighed, and felt more sympathetic than usual. She had been thinking about George Gerard for the last four days more than seemed at all reasonable; and it occurred to her that if she were

ever to be seriously in love, she might be quite as foolish as her friend.

The day wore on very slowly, for both women. Laura watched the clock, and gave herself up to the study of railway time-tables, in order to calculate the probabilities as to John Treverton's return. She sent the carriage to meet an afternoon train, and the carriage came back empty. This was a disappointment, though she argued with herself afterwards that she had not been justified in expecting her husband by that train.

An especially excellent dinner had been ordered, in the hope that the master of the house would be at home to eat it. Seven o'clock came, but no John Treverton, and so the dinner was deferred till eight; and at eight Laura would have had it kept back till nine if Celia had not protested against such cruelty.

'I don't suppose you asked me to stay here with the deliberate intention of starving me,' she said, 'but that is exactly what you are doing. I feel as if it was weeks since I had eaten anything. There is no possibility—at least so far as the railway

goes—of Mr. Treverton's being here before half-past ten ; so you really may as well let me have a little food, even if you are too much in the clouds to eat your dinner.'

'I am not in the clouds, dear, I am only anxious.'

They went into the dining-room and sat down to the table which seemed so empty and dismal without the master of the house. The carriage was ordered to meet the last train. Celia ate an excellent dinner, talking more or less all the time. Laura was too agitated to eat anything. She was glad to get back to the drawing-room, where she could walk up and down, and lift the curtain from one of the windows every now and then to look out and listen for wheels that were not likely to be heard within an hour.

'Laura, you are making me positively miserable,' Celia cried at last. 'You are as monotonous in your movements as a squirrel in his cage, and don't seem half so happy as a squirrel. It's a fine, dry night. We had better wrap ourselves up and walk to the gate to meet the carriage. Anything will be better than this.'

‘I should enjoy it above all things,’ said Laura.

Five minutes later they were both clad in fur jackets and hats, and were walking briskly towards the avenue.

The night was fine, and lit with wintry stars. There was no moon, but that clear sky, with its pale radiance of stars, gave quite enough light to direct the footsteps of the two girls, who knew every inch of the way.

They had not gone far before Celia, whose tongue ran on gaily, and whose eyes roamed in every direction, espied a man walking a little way in front of them.

‘A strange man,’ she cried. ‘Look, Laura! I hope he’s not a burglar!’

‘Why should he be a burglar? No doubt he is some tradesman who has been delivering goods at the kitchen door.’

‘At ten o’clock?’ cried Celia. ‘Most irregular. Why, every respectable tradesman in the village is in bed and asleep by this time.’

Laura made no further suggestion. The subject

had no interest for her. She was straining her ears to catch the first sound of wheels on the frost-bound high-road. Celia quickened her pace.

‘Let’s try and overtake him,’ she said; ‘I think it’s our duty. You ought not to allow suspicious looking strangers to hang about your grounds without at least trying to find out who they are. He may have a revolver, but I’ll risk it.’

With this heroic determination Celia went off at a run, and presently came up with the man, who was walking steadily on in front of her. At the sound of her footsteps he stopped and looked round.

‘I beg your pardon,’ gasped Celia, in a breathless condition, and looking anxiously for the expected revolver. ‘Have you been leaving anything at the Manor House?’

‘No, madam. I’ve only been making an inquiry,’ the man replied, quietly.

‘It is one of John’s tenants, Celia,’ said Laura overtaking them. ‘You have been to inquire about Mr. Treverton’s return, I suppose,’ she added, to the stranger.

‘Yes, madam. My visit is to come to an end on Monday morning, and I am getting anxious. I want to see Mr. Treverton before I go back. It will save me a journey to and fro, you see, madam, and time is money to a man in my position.’

‘I expect him home this evening,’ Laura answered, kindly; ‘and if he does come to-night, as I hope he will, I have no doubt he will see you as early as you like on Monday morning. At nine, if that will not be too early for you.’

‘I thank you, madam. That will suit me admirably.’

‘Good evening,’ said Laura.

The man lifted his hat and walked away.

‘A very decent person,’ remarked Celia; ‘not a bit like the popular notion of a burglar, but perhaps not altogether unlike the real thing. A respectable appearance must be a great advantage to a criminal.’

‘There it is,’ cried Laura, joyfully.

‘What?’

‘The carriage. Yes, I am sure. Yes—he is coming. Let’s run on to the gate, Celia.’

They ran as fast as a brace of school-girls, and arrived at the gate in a flutter of excitement, just in time to see the neat little brougham turn into the avenue.

‘Jack,’ cried Laura.

‘Stop,’ cried Jack, with his head out of the window, and the coachman pulled up his horses, as his master jumped out of the carriage.

‘Come out, Sampson,’ said Mr. Treverton. ‘We’ll walk to the house with the ladies.’

He put his wife’s hand through his arm and walked on, leaving Celia to Mr. Sampson’s escort.

They had much to say to each other, husband and wife, in this happy meeting. John Treverton was in high spirits, full of delight at returning to his wife, full of triumph in the thought that no one could oust him from the home they both loved.

Tom Sampson walked in the rear with Miss Clare. She was dying to question him as to where he and his client had been, and what they had been doing, but felt that to do so would be bad manners, and knew that it would be use-

less. So she confined herself to general remarks of a polite nature.

‘I hope you have had what the Yankees call a good time, Mr. Sampson,’ she said.

‘Very much so, thanks, Miss Clare,’ answered Sampson, recalling a dinner eaten at Véfour’s just before leaving Paris on the previous evening. ‘The kewsine is really first-class.’

If there was one word Celia hated more than another it was this last odious adjective.

‘You came by the four o’clock express from Waterloo, I suppose,’ hazarded Celia.

‘Yes, and a capital train it is!’

‘Ah!’ sighed Celia, ‘I wish I had a little more experience of trains. I stick in my native soil till I feel myself fast becoming a vegetable.’

‘No fear of that,’ exclaimed Mr. Sampson. ‘Such a girl as you—all life and spirit and cleverness—no fear of your ever assimilating to the vegetable tribe. There’s my poor sister Eliza, now, there’s a good deal of the vegetable about her. Her ideas run in such a narrow groove. I know before I go down to breakfast of a

morning exactly what she'll say to me, and I get to answer her mechanically. And at dinner again we sit opposite each other like a couple of talking automaton. It's a dismal life, Miss Clare, for a man with any pretence to mind. If you only knew how I sometimes sigh for a more congenial companion !'

'But I don't know anything about it, Mr. Sampson,' answered Celia, tartly. 'How should I?'

'You might,' murmured Sampson, tenderly, 'if you had as much sympathy with my ideas as I have with yours.'

'Nonsense !' cried Celia. 'What sympathy can there be between you and me? We haven't an idea in common. A business man like you, with his mind wholly occupied by leases and draft agreements and wills and writs and things, and a girl who doesn't know an iota of law.'

'That's just it !' exclaimed Sampson. 'A man in my position wants a green spot in his life—a haven from the ocean of business—an o—what's its name—in the barren desert of legal transactions. I want a home, Miss Clare—a home !'

‘How can you say so, Mr. Sampson? I am sure you have a very comfortable house, and a model housekeeper in your sister.’

‘A young woman may be too good a housekeeper, Miss Clare,’ answered Sampson, seriously. ‘My sister is a little over-conscientious in her house-keeping. In her desire to keep down expenses she sometimes cuts things a little too fine. I don’t hold with waste or extravagance—I shudder at the thought of it—but I don’t like to be asked to eat rank salt butter on a Saturday morning because the regulation amount of fresh has run out, and Eliza won’t allow another half-pound to be had in till Saturday afternoon. That’s letting a virtue merge into a vice, Miss Clare.’

‘Poor Miss Sampson. It is quite too good of her to study your purse so carefully.’

‘So it is, Miss Clare,’ answered the solicitor, doubtfully, ‘but I see ribbons round Eliza’s neck, and bonnets upon Eliza’s head, that I can’t always account for satisfactorily to myself. She has a little income of her own, as you no doubt know, since everybody knows everything at Hazlehurst,

and she has made her little investments in cottage property out of her little income, which, as you may also know, is derived from cottage property, and she has added a cottage here and a cottage there, till she is swelling out into a little town, as you may say—well, I should think she must have five and twenty tenements in all—and I sometimes ask myself how she manages to invest so much of her little income, and yet to dress so smart. There isn't a better dressed young lady in Hazlehurst—present company, of course, excepted—than my sister. You may have noticed the fact.'

'I have,' replied Celia, convulsed with inward laughter. 'Her bonnets have been my admiration and my envy.'

'No, Miss Clare, not your envy,' protested Sampson, with exceeding tenderness. 'You can envy no one. Perfection has no need to envy. It must feel its own superiority. But I was about to observe, in confidence, that I would rather the housekeeping money was spent on butter than on bonnets; and that when I feel myself deprived of

any little luxury, it is a poor consolation to know that my self-denial will provide Eliza with a neck ribbon. No, my dear Miss Clare, the hour must come when my sister will have to give up the keys of her cupboards at the Laurels, and retire to a home of her own. She is amply provided for. There will be no unkindness in such a severance. You know the old proverb, "Two is company, three is none." It doesn't sound grammatical, but it's very true. When I marry, Eliza will have to go.'

'But you are not thinking of matrimony yet awhile, I hope, Mr. Sampson?'

'Yet awhile,' echoed Sampson; 'I'm three and thirty. If I don't take the business in hand now, Miss Clare, it will be too late. I am thinking of matrimony, and have been thinking of it very constantly for the last six months. But there is only one girl in the world that I would care to marry, and if she won't have me I shall go down to my grave a bachelor.'

'Don't say that,' cried Celia. 'That is deciding things much too hastily. You haven't seen all the girls in the world. How can you know

anything about it? Hazlehurst is such a narrow sphere. A man might as well live in a nutshell, and call that life. You ought to travel. You ought to see the world of fashion. There are charming boarding-houses at Brighton, now, where you would meet very stylish girls. Why don't you try Brighton?'

'I don't want to try Brighton, or anywhere else,' exclaimed Mr. Sampson, with a wounded air. 'I tell you I am fixed, fixed as fate. There is only one girl in this magnificent universe I want for my wife. Celia, you must feel it, you must know it—you are that girl.'

'Oh, I am so sorry,' cried Celia. 'This is quite too dreadful.'

'It is not dreadful at all. Don't be carried away by the first shock of the thing. I may have been too sudden, perhaps. Oh, Celia, I have worshipped too long in silence, and I may, perchance—' Mr. Sampson rather dwelt on the perchance, which seemed to him a word of peculiar appropriateness—almost a lapse into poetry. 'I may, perchance, have been too sudden in my avowal. But when a man

is as much in earnest as I am, he does not study details. Celia, you must not say no.'

'But I do say no,' protested Celia.

'Not an irrevocable no?'

'Yes, a most irrevocable no. I am very much flattered, of course, and I really like you very much—as we all do—because you are good and true and honest. But I never, never, never could think of you in any other character than that of a trustworthy friend.'

'Do you really mean it?' asked poor Sampson, aghast.

He was altogether crushed by this unexpected blow. That any young lady in Hazlehurst could refuse the honour of an alliance with him had never occurred to him as within the range of possibility. He had taken plenty of time in making up his mind upon the matrimonial question. He had been careful and deliberate, and had waited till he was thoroughly convinced that Celia Clare was precisely the kind of wife he wanted, before committing himself by a serious declaration. He had been careful that his polite attentions should

not be too significant, until the final die was cast. His journey to Brittany had given him ample leisure for reflection. Prostrate in his comfortable berth on board the St. Malo steamer, in the dim light of the cabin lamp, lulled by the monotonous oscillation of the steamer, he had been able to contemplate the question of marriage from every standpoint, and this offer of to-night was the result of those meditations.

Celia told him, with all due courtesy, that she really did mean to refuse him.

‘You might do worse,’ he said, dolefully.

‘No doubt I might. Some rather vulgar person has compared matrimony to a bag of snakes, in which there is only one eel. Perhaps you are the one eel. But then you see I am not obliged to marry anybody. I can go on like Queen Elizabeth,

“ ‘In maiden meditation, fancy free.’ ”

‘That’s not likely,’ said Mr. Sampson, moodily. ‘A young lady of your stamp won’t remain single. You’re too attractive and too lively. No, you’ll marry some scamp for the sake of his good looks : and perhaps the day will come when you’ll

remember this evening, and feel sorry that you rejected an honest man's offer.'

They were at the house by this time, much to Celia's relief, as she felt that the conversation could hardly be carried on further without unpleasantness.

She stopped in the hall, and offered her hand to her dejected admirer.

'Shake hands, Mr. Sampson, to show that you bear no malice,' she said. 'Be assured I shall always like and respect you as a friend of our family.'

She did not wait for his answer, but tripped lightly upstairs, determined not to make her appearance again that evening.

Tom Sampson was inclined to return to his own house, without waiting to say good-night to his client, but while he stood in the hall making up his mind on this point, John Treverton came out of the dining-room to look for him.

'Why, Sampson, what are you doing out there?' he cried. 'Come in and have some supper. You haven't eaten much since we left Paris.'

'Much,' echoed Sampson, dismally. 'A segment of hard biscuit on board the boat, and a cup of

weak tea at Dover, have been my only sustenance. But I don't feel that I care about supper,' he added, surveying the table with a melancholy eye. 'I ought to be hungry, but I'm not.'

'Why, you seem quite low spirited, Mr. Sampson?' said Laura, kindly.

'I am feeling a little low to-night, Mrs. Treverton.'

'Nonsense, man. Low spirited on such a night as this, after the triumph you achieved at Auray! Wasn't it wonderful, Laura, that Sampson's acumen should have hit upon the idea of my first marriage being invalid? It was the only chance we had—the only thing that could have saved the estate.'

'Of course it was,' replied Sampson, 'and that was why I thought of it. A lawyer is bound to see every chance, however remote. I don't know that in my own mind I thought it really likely that your first wife had been encumbered with a living husband when you married her; but I saw that it was just the one loophole for your escape from a most confounded fix.'

Cheered by the idea that he had saved his

client's fortune, and comforted by a tumbler or two of irreproachable champagne, Mr. Sampson managed to eat a very good supper, and he trudged briskly homewards on the stroke of midnight, tolerably content with himself and life in general.

'Perhaps after all I may be better off as a bachelor than with the most fascinating of wives,' he reflected. 'But I must come to an understanding with Eliza. Cheeseparing is all very well as long as *my* cheese is not pared. I must let Eliza know that I'm master, and that my tastes are to be consulted in every particular. When I think of the melted butter they gave me last night at Veefoor's, and the sauce with that *sole normandy*, I shudder at the recollection of the bill-sticker's paste I've been asked to eat at my own table. If Eliza is to go on keeping house for me, there must be a revolution in the cookery.'

John Treverton and his wife spent a Sabbath of exceeding peacefulness. They appeared at church together, morning and evening, much to the discomfiture of Edward Clare, who was surprised to see them looking so happy.

‘Does he think the storm has blown over?’ Edward said to himself. ‘Poor wretch. He will discover his mistake before long.’

The Vicar went to the Manor House after the evening service, and he and John Treverton were closeted together in the library for an hour or more, during which time John told his wife’s trustee all that had happened at Auray, and showed him documents which proved Marie Pomellec’s marriage with Jean Kergariou, and Kergariou’s death two years after her second marriage.

‘Providence has been very good to you, John Treverton,’ said the Vicar, when he had heard everything. ‘You cannot be too grateful for your escape from disgrace and difficulty. But I hope you will always remember that your own sin is not lessened by this discovery. I hope that you honestly and truly repent that sin.’

‘Can I do otherwise?’ asked John Treverton, sadly. ‘Has it not brought fear and sorrow upon one I love better than myself. The thing was done to benefit her, but I feel now that it was not the less dishonourable.’

‘Well, we will try to forget all about it,’ said the good-natured Vicar, who, in exhorting a sinner to repentance, never wished to make the burden of remorse too heavy. ‘I only desired that you should see your conduct in a proper light, as a Christian and a gentleman. God knows how grateful I am to Him for His mercy to you and my dear Laura. It would have almost broken my heart to see you turned out of this house.’

‘Like Adam and Eve out of Paradise,’ said Treverton, smiling, ‘and my poor Eve a sinless sufferer.’

After this serious talk the Vicar and his host went back to the drawing-room, where Laura and Celia were sitting by a glorious wood fire reading Robertson’s sermons.

‘What a darling he was,’ cried Celia, with a gush. ‘And how desperately in love with him I should have been if I had lived at Brighton in his time and heard him preach. His are the only sermons I can read without feeling bored. If that dear prosy old father of mine would only take a lesson——’

Her father’s entrance silenced her, just as she

was about to criticise his capabilities as a preacher. The Vicar went straight to Laura, and took both her hands in his hearty grasp.

‘My dear, dear girl,’ he said. ‘Providence has ordered all things well for you. You have no more trouble to fear!’

It was not till the next morning that Laura remembered her husband’s anxious tenant from Beechampton. Husband and wife were breakfasting together *tête-à-tête* in the book-room, at half-past seven, John Treverton dressed in his hunting gear, ready to start for a six-mile ride to the meet of staghounds among the pasture-clad hills. Celia, who did not consider that her obligations as a guest included early rising, was still luxuriating in morning dreams.

‘Oh, by-the-by,’ exclaimed Laura, when she and her husband had talked about many things, ‘I quite forgot to tell you about your tenant at Beechampton. He is coming to see you at nine o’clock this morning. It is a rather important matter he wants to see you about, he says. He has been extremely anxious for your return.’

‘My tenant at Beechampton, dear,’ said John Treverton, with a puzzled air. ‘Who can that be? I have no property at Beechampton except ground rents, and Sampson collects those. I have nothing to do with the tenants.’

‘Yes, but this is something about drainage, and your tenant wants to see you. He said you were the ground landlord of some houses which he holds.’

John Treverton shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

‘Rather a bore,’ he said. ‘But if he is here at nine o’clock I don’t mind seeing him—I shan’t wait for him. I’ve ordered my horse at nine sharp. And I’ve ordered the pony carriage for you and Celia to drive to the meet. It’s a fine morning, and the fresh air will do you good.’

‘Then I’d better send a message to Celia,’ said Laura. ‘She is given to late hours in wintry weather.’

She rang the bell and told Trimmer to send one of the maids to Miss Clare to say that she was to be ready for a drive at nine o’clock; and

then John and his wife dawdled over their talk and breakfast till half-past eight, by which time the January sun was bright enough to invite them into the garden.

‘Run and put on your sealskin, Laura, and come for a turn in the grounds,’ said Mr. Treverton.

The obedient wife departed, and came back in five minutes, in a brown cloth dress, with jacket, hat, and muff of darkest sealskin.

‘What a delightful study in brown,’ said John.

They went out into the Dutch garden—that garden where John Treverton had walked alone on the morning after his first arrival at Hazlehurst—the garden where he had seen Laura standing under the yew tree arch, in the glad April sunshine. They passed under the arch to-day, and made the circuit of the orchard, and speculated as to how long it would be before the primroses would brighten the grassy banks, and the wild purple crocuses break through the sod, like imprisoned souls rising from a wintry grave.

Never had they been happier together—perhaps never so happy—for John Treverton's mind was no longer burdened with the secret of an unhappy past. To-day it seemed to both as if there was not a cloud on their horizon. They strolled about orchard and garden until the church clock struck nine, and then John went straight to the hall door, where his handsome bay stood waiting for him, and where Laura's ponies were rattling their bits, and shaking their pretty little thoroughbred heads, in a general impatience to be doing something, were it only running away with the light basket carriage to which they were harnessed.

‘Oh, there is your tenant,’ said Laura, as she and her husband came round the gravel drive from the adjacent garden, ‘standing at the hall door waiting for you.’

‘Is that he?’ exclaimed Treverton. ‘He looks uncommonly like a Londoner. Well, my good fellow,’ he began, going up to the man, hunting-crop in hand, ready to mount his horse, ‘what is your business with me? Please make it as short as you

can, for I've six miles to ride before I begin my day's work.'

'I shall be very brief, Mr. Treverton,' answered the stranger, coming close up to the master of Hazlehurst Manor, and speaking in a low and serious tone, 'for I want to catch the up-train at 11.30, and I must take you with me. I'm a police officer from Scotland Yard, and I am here to arrest you on suspicion of having murdered your wife, known as Mademoiselle Chicot, at Cibber Street, Leicester Square, on the 19th of February, 187—.'

John Treverton turned deadly pale; but he faced the man without flinching.

'I'll come with you immediately,' he said; 'but you can do me one favour. Don't let my wife know the nature of the business that takes me to London. I can get it broken to her gently after I am gone.'

'Don't you think you'd better tell her yourself?' suggested the detective, in a friendly tone. 'She'll take it better from you than from any one else. I've always found it so. Tell her the truth, and let her come to London with us, if she likes.'

‘You are right,’ said Treverton, ‘she’ll be happier near me than eating her heart out down here. You’ve got some one with you, I suppose. You didn’t reckon upon taking me single handed?’

‘I didn’t reckon upon your making any resistance. You’re too much a gentleman and a man of the world. I’ve no doubt you can clear yourself when you come before a magistrate, and that the business will go no further. It was your being absent from the inquest, you know, that made things look bad against you.’

‘Yes, that was a mistake,’ answered Treverton.

‘I’ve got a man inside,’ said the detective. ‘If you’ll step into the parlour, and have it out with your wife, he can wait in the hall. Perhaps you wouldn’t mind ordering a trap of some kind to take us to the station. It might look better for you to go in your own trap.’

‘Yes, I’ll see to it,’ assented John Treverton, absently. ‘Answer me one question, there’s a good fellow. Who set Scotland Yard on my heels? Who put you up to the fact that I am the man who called himself Chicot?’

‘Never you mind how we got at that, sir,’ replied the detective, sagely. ‘That’s a kind of thing we never tell. We got the straight tip; that’s all you need know. It don’t make no difference to you how we got it, does it now?’

‘Yes,’ said John Treverton, ‘it makes a great difference. But I daresay I shall know all about it before long.’

CHAPTER IX.

ON SUSPICION.

MR. TREVERTON'S hunter was taken back to his loose-box, where he executed an energetic *pas seul* with his hind legs, in the exuberance of his feelings at being let off his day's work. Mr. Treverton himself was closeted with his wife in the book-room, but not alone. The man from Scotland Yard was present throughout the interview, while his subordinate, a respectable-looking young man in plain clothes, paced quietly up and down the corridor outside.

Laura bore this last crushing blow as she had borne the first—with a noble heroism. She neither wept nor trembled, but stood by her husband's side, pale and steadfast, ready to sustain and comfort him, rather than to add to his burden with the weight of her own grief.

'I am not afraid, John,' she said. 'I am almost

glad that you should face this hideous charge. Better to be put upon your trial, and prove yourself innocent, as I know you can, than to live all your life under the shadow of a groundless suspicion.'

She spoke boldly, yet her heart sickened at the thought that it might not be easy, perhaps not even possible, for her husband to prove himself guiltless. She remembered what had been said at the time of the murder, and how every circumstance had seemed to point at him as the murderer.

'My dearest, I shall be able to confront this charge,' answered John Treverton. 'I have no fear of that. I made a miserable mistake in not facing the difficulty at the time. The business may be a little more troublesome now than it would have been then; but I am not afraid. I would not ask you to go to London with me, darling, if I feared the result of my journey.'

'Do you think I would let you go alone, in any case?' asked Laura.

She was thinking that even if this trouble were to end in the scaffold, she would be with him to the last, clinging to him and holding by him as

other brave women had held by their loved ones, face to face with death. But no, it would not come to that. She was so convinced, in her own mind, of his innocence, that she could not suppose there would be much difficulty in proving the fact in a court of law.

‘You will take your maid with you, of course?’ said Treverton.

‘Yes, I should like to take Mary.’

‘Where am I to be during this inquiry?’ asked Treverton, turning to the detective.

‘At the House of Detention, Clerkenwell.’

‘Not the most desirable neighbourhood, but it might be worse,’ said Treverton.

‘They are surely not going to put you in prison, John, before they have proved anything against you?’ cried his wife, with a look of horror.

‘It’s only a form, dear. We needn’t call it prison; but I shan’t be exactly at large. I think, perhaps, the best plan would be for you to take quiet lodgings at Islington, say in Colebrook Row, for instance. That’s a decent place. You’d prefer that to an hotel, wouldn’t you?’

‘Infinitely.’

‘Very well. You had better put up at the Midland Hotel to-night, and to-morrow morning you and Mary can drive about in a cab till you find a nice lodging. I shall write a line to Sampson, asking him to follow us as soon as he can. He may be of use to us in London.’

Everything was settled as quietly as if they had been starting on a pleasure trip. The brougham was at the door in time to take them to the station. Celia, who was ready dressed to drive to the meet, was the only person who appeared excited or bewildered.

‘What does it all mean, Laura?’ she asked. ‘Have you and Mr. Treverton gone suddenly mad? At eight o’clock you send up to tell me you are going to take me to the meet; and at nine I find you are starting for London, with two strange men. What can you mean by it?’

‘It means very serious business, Celia,’ Laura answered, quietly. ‘Do not worry yourself about it. You will know everything, by-and-by.’

‘By-and-by,’ echoed Celia, scornfully. ‘I sup-

pose you mean when I go to heaven, and look down upon you with a new pair of eyes? I want to know now. By-and-by will not be the least use. I remember when I was a child, if people told me I should have anything by-and-by, I never got it.'

'Good-bye, Celia, dearest. John will write to your father.'

'Yes, and my father will keep the letter all to himself. When will you be back?'

'Soon, I hope; but I cannot say how soon.'

'Now, madam,' said the police-officer, 'the time is up.'

Laura embraced her friend, and stepped into the carriage. Her husband followed, then the detective, and lastly, the faithful Mary, who had had hard work to get a couple of portmanteaus packed for her master and mistress, and a few things huddled into a carpet-bag for herself. She had no idea where they were going, or the motive of this sudden journey. A few hasty words had been said to Trimmer, as to the conduct of the household, and that was all.

At the station Mr. Palby, the detective, contrived to secure a compartment for Mr. and Mrs. Treverton and himself. His subordinate was to travel with Mary in a second-class carriage.

‘You needn’t be afraid of his talking,’ said Mr. Palby to his prisoner. ‘Grummles is as close as wax.’

‘It can matter very little whether he talks or not,’ answered Treverton, indifferently. ‘Everybody will know everything in a day or two. The newspapers will make my story public.’

He thought with supreme bitterness how much easier it would have been for him to face this accusation as Jack Chicot than as John Treverton, *alias* Chicot ; how much less there would have been for the newspapers to say about him, had he stood boldly forward at the inquest and faced his difficulty. About Jack Chicot, the literary Bohemian, the world would have been little curious. How much greater was the scandal now that the accused was a man of fortune, a country squire, the bearer of a good old name.

At five o’clock that winter afternoon the doors

of the House of Detention closed upon John Treverton. There was some deference shown to the accused even here, and much consideration for the lovely young wife, who remained quietly with her husband to the last moment, and gave vent to none of the lamentations which were wont to disturb the orderly silence of those stony halls. Laura made herself acquainted with the rules and regulations to which her husband would be subject—the hours at which she would be allowed to see him, and then bade him good-bye without a tear. It was only when she and Mary were alone in the cab, on their way to the Midland Hotel, that her fortitude broke down, and she burst into convulsive sobs.

‘Oh, please don’t,’ cried Mary, putting her friendly arms round her mistress. ‘You mustn’t give way, indeed you mustn’t. It’s so dreadful bad for you. Everything’s bound to come right, ma’am. Look at master, how cheerful he is, and how brave and handsome he looked in that horrid place.’

‘Yes, Mary, he pretended to be cheerful and confident for my sake, just as I try to keep myself

calm in order to sustain him. But it is a mere pretence on both sides. I shall be a miserable woman until this inquiry is over.'

'Well, ma'am, of course it's an anxious time.'

'We have hardly a friend who can help us. What does Mr. Sampson know of criminal law? What does my husband know as to what he ought to do to protect himself in his present position? We are like children lost in a dark wood—a wood where there are beasts of prey that may devour us.'

'Mr. Sampson seems very clever, ma'am. Depend upon it, he'll know what to do. Lor', what a ugly place this London is,' exclaimed Mary, looking with astonished eyes at the architectural beauties of the Gray's Inn-road, 'everything so dark and smoky. Beechampton is ever so much grander.'

Here the cab turned into the Euston-road, and the palatial front of the Midland Hotel revealed itself in a burst of splendour to Mary's astonished eyes.

'My!' she exclaimed, 'it must be Buckingham Palace, surely!'

Her astonishment became stupefaction when the cab drove under the Italian-Gothic portico, and a liveried page sprang forward to open the door, and relieve the bewildered Abigail of her mistress's travelling bag. Her surprise and admiration went on increasing, like a geometrical progression, commencing above unity, as she followed her mistress across the pillared hall and up the marble staircase, to a corridor, whose remote perspective ended far away in a twinkling speck of gaslight.

‘Gracious, what a place,’ she cried. ‘If all the hotels in London are like this what must the Queen’s palace be?’

The polite German attendant opened the door of a sitting-room, where a bright fire burned as if to welcome expected guests. He had softly murmured the words ‘sitting-room’ into Laura’s ear as she crossed the hall, and she had bowed gently in assent. No more was needed. He felt that she was the right sort of customer for the Grand Midland.

‘Die pettroom is vithin,’ he said, indicating a door of communication. ‘Dere is also tressing

room. Dere vill pe^a a room vanted for die mait, matam, I subbose. I vill sent die champermait. Matam vill vish to tine?’

‘No, thanks. You can bring some tea,’ answered Laura, sinking wearily into a chair. She kept her veil down to hide her tear-stained cheeks. ‘If a gentleman called Sampson should inquire for me in the course of the evening, please send him here.’

‘Yes, matame. Vat name?’

‘What man! Oh, you mean my own name. Treverton, Mrs. Treverton.’

She shuddered at the thought that in a few days the name might be notorious.

Mary ordered a dish of cutlets to be sent up with the tea, and presently she and the chambermaid were arranging Mrs. Treverton’s bedroom, opening the portmanteau, setting out the ivory brushes and silvertopped bottles from the travelling bag, and giving a look of comfort and homeliness to the strange apartment.

Fires were lighted in the bedroom and dressing room, and there was that all-pervading air of

luxury, which, to the traveller of limited means, suggests the idea that, for the time being, he is living at the rate of ten thousand a year.

The evening was sad and weary for Laura Treverton. Now only was she beginning to realise the catastrophe that had befallen her. Now only, as she walked up and down the strange sitting-room, alone, friendless, in the big world of London, did all the horror of her position come home to her.

Her husband a prisoner, charged with the most direful offence man can commit against his fellow-man, to be brought, perhaps to-morrow, to face his accusers, and to have the details of his supposed guilt bandied from lip to lip to-morrow night, the subject of idle wonder and foolish speculations. *He*, her darling, degraded to the lowest depth to which humanity can fall! It was too horrible. She clasped her hands before her eyes, as if to shut out an actual scene of horror—the dock, the judgment-seat, the hangman, and the scaffold.

‘My husband suspected of such a crime,’ she said to herself. ‘My husband, whose inmost

thoughts are known to me; a man incapable of cruelty to the meanest thing that crawls.'

Sometimes, in the course of those slow hours, a sudden excitement took hold of her. She forgot everything except the one fact of her husband's position.

'Let us go to him, Mary,' she cried. 'Get me my hat and jacket, and let us go to him directly.'

'Indeed, ma'am, we can't get in,' remonstrated Mary. 'Don't you remember what they told us about the hours of admission. You were only to see him at a particular time. Why, they're all abed by this time, poor things, I make no doubt.'

'How cruel,' cried Laura; 'how cruel it is that I can't be with him.'

'If you go on worrying yourself like this, ma'am, you'll be ill. You haven't eaten a bit since you left home, though I'm sure the cutlets was done lovely. Shall I order some arrowroot for your supper? Or a basin of soup, now? That would be more nourishing.'

'No, Mary, it's no use. I can't eat anything. How I wish Mr. Sampson would come.'

‘It’s almost too late to expect him, ma’am. I don’t suppose he’s left Hazlehurst. Perhaps he couldn’t get away to-day.’

‘Not get away!’ echoed Laura. ‘Nonsense. He would never abandon my husband in the hour of difficulty.’

The German waiter at this very moment announced, ‘Mr. Zambzon.’

‘I’m awfully late, Mrs. Treverton,’ said the little man, bustling in, ‘but I thought you’d like to see me, so I came in. I’ve engaged a room in the hotel, and I shall stay as long as I’m wanted, even if my Hazlehurst business goes to pot.’

‘How good you are. You have only just come to London?’

‘Only just come indeed! I came by the train after yours. I was in London at seven o’clock. I’ve been with Mr. Leopold, the well-known solicitor—the man who’s so great in criminal cases, you know—and I’ve got him for our side. And I’ve been down to Cibber Street with him, and we’ve picked up all the information we can. The landlady’s laid up with low fever, and so we

couldn't get much out of her, but we've seen Mr. Gerard, and we know pretty well what he has to bring forward against us, and I think he'll be rather a reluctant witness. It's a pity that Mr. Desrolles is out of the way. We might have made something out of him.'

Laura turned to him with a startled look. Desrolles! That was the name by which her husband had known her father. He, to whom an alias seemed so easy, had been known in his London lodgings as Mr. Desrolles. And he had been in the house at the time of the murder.

'You have no fear as to the result, have you?' Laura asked Sampson, with intense anxiety. 'My husband will be able to prove himself innocent of this terrible crime.'

'I don't believe the other side will be able to prove him guilty,' said Sampson, thoughtfully.

'But he may remain all his life under the stigma of this hideous suspicion. The world will believe him guilty, though the crime cannot be brought home to him. Is that what you mean?'

'My dear Mrs. Treverton, I am not clever

enough or experienced enough to offer an opinion in such a case as this. We are only at the outset of things. Besides, I am no criminal lawyer.'

'What does Mr. Leopold say?' asked Laura, looking at him intently.

'I am not at liberty to tell you that. It would be a breach of confidence,' answered Sampson.

'I see. Mr. Leopold thinks there is a strong case against my husband.'

'Mr. Leopold thinks nothing at present. He has no data to go upon.'

'He must remember the report of the inquest and all that was said in the newspapers.'

'Mr. Leopold thinks that of the newspapers,' exclaimed Sampson, snapping his fingers. 'Mr. Leopold is not led by the nose by the newspapers. He would not be where he is if he were that kind of man.'

'Well, we must wait and hope,' said Laura, with a sigh. 'It is a hard trial, but it must be borne. Will anything be done to-morrow?'

‘There will be an inquiry at Bow-street.’

‘Will Mr. Leopold be present?’

‘Of course. He will watch the case as a cat watches a mouse.’

‘Tell him that I should think half my fortune too little to reward him if he can prove—clearly and plainly prove—my husband’s innocence.’

‘Mr. Leopold won’t ask for your fortune. He’s as rich as——well, rolling in money. He’ll do his duty, you may depend upon it, without any prompting from me.’

CHAPTER X.

MR. LEOPOLD ASKS IRRELEVANT QUESTIONS.

AN inquiry was held at Bow Street next day. Several of the witnesses who had appeared nearly a year ago at the inquest were present, and much of the evidence that had been then given was now repeated. The policeman who had been called in by Desrolles, the doctor who had first examined the dead woman's wound, and the detective who examined the premises—all these gave their evidence exactly as they had given it at the inquest. Mrs. Evitt was too ill to appear, but her previous statements were read. There was one witness present on this occasion who had not appeared at the inquest. This was George Gerard, who had been subpoenaed by the prosecution, and who described, with a somewhat reluctant air, his discovery of the dagger in Jack Chicot's colour box.

‘This was a curious discovery of yours, Mr. Gerard,’ said Mr. Leopold, after the witness had been examined, ‘and comes to light at a curious time. Why did you not inform the police of this discovery when you made it?’

‘I was not called as a witness.’

‘No. But if you considered this discovery of yours of any importance, it was your duty to make it known immediately. You make your way into the house of the accused without anybody’s authorisation; you go prying and peering into rooms that have already been examined by the police; and you come forward a year afterwards with this extraordinary discovery of a tarnished dagger. What evidence have we that this dagger ever belonged to the accused?’

‘There need be no difficulty about that,’ said John Treverton, ‘the dagger is mine.’

Mr. Leopold rewarded his client’s candour with a ferocious scowl. Was there ever such a man? a man who was legally dumb, whose lips the law had sealed, and who had the folly to blurt out such an admission as this.

The magistrate asked whether the dagger could be found. The police had taken possession of all Jack Chicot's chattels. The dagger was no doubt among them.

‘Let it be found and given to the divisional surgeon to be examined,’ said the magistrate.

The inquiry was adjourned at the request of Mr. Leopold, who wanted time to meet the evidence against his client. The magistrate, who felt that the case was hardly strong enough for committal, granted this respite. An hour later John Treverton was closeted with Mr. Leopold and Mr. Sampson, in his room at Clerkenwell.

‘The medical evidence shows that the murder must have been committed at one o’clock,’ said Mr. Leopold. ‘You only discovered it at five minutes before three. What were you doing with yourself during those hours. At the worst we ought to be able to prove an *alibi*.’

‘I’m afraid that would be difficult,’ answered Treverton, thoughtfully. ‘I was very unhappy at that period of my life, and had acquired a habit of roaming about the streets of London between

midnight and morning. I had suffered from a painful attack of sleeplessness, and this night-roving was the only thing that gave me relief. I was at a literary club near the Strand on the night of the murder. I left a few minutes after twelve. It was a fine, mild night—wonderfully mild for the time of year—and I walked to Hampstead Heath and back.’

‘Humph!’ muttered Mr. Leopold, ‘you couldn’t have managed things better, if you wanted to put the rope round your neck. You left your club a few minutes after twelve, you say—in comfortable time for the murder. You were seen to leave, I suppose?’

‘Yes, I left with another member, a water-colour painter, who lives at Haverstock Hill.’

‘Good—and he walked with you as far as Haverstock Hill, I suppose?’

‘No, he didn’t. We walked to St. Martin’s Church together, and there he took a hansom. He had no latch-key, and wanted to get home in decent time.’

‘Did you tell him you were going to walk up to the Heath?’

‘No, I had no definite purpose. I walked as far, and in whatever direction my fancy took me.’

‘Precisely. Then your friend, the water-colour painter, parted from you at about a quarter-past twelve?’

‘It struck the quarter while we were wishing each other good-night.’

‘Within five minutes’ walk of your lodging. No chance of an *alibi* here, I fear, Mr. Treverton; unless you met any one on Hampstead Heath, which, in the middle of the night, was not very likely.’

‘I neither met nor spoke to a mortal, except a man at a coffee stall near the Mother Redcap, on my way back.’

‘Oh! you talked to a man at a coffee-stall, did you?’

‘Yes, I stopped to take a cup of coffee at ten minutes past two. If the same man is to be found there he ought to remember me. He was a loquacious fellow, something of a wag, and we had quite a political discussion. There had been an important division in the House the night before, and

my friend at the coffee stall was well posted in his *Daily Telegraph*.'

Mr. Leopold made a note of the circumstance while John Treverton was talking.

'So far so good. Now we come to another point. Is there anybody whom you suspect as implicated in this murder? Can you trace a motive anywhere for such an 'act?'

'No,' answered Treverton, decidedly.

'Yet you see the murder must have been done by some one, and that some one must have had a motive. It was not a case of suicide. The medical evidence at the inquest clearly demonstrated that.'

'You remember the inquest?'

'Yes, I was present.'

'Indeed!' exclaimed Treverton, surprised.

'Yes, I was there. Now to continue my argument, you as the husband of the victim, must have been familiar with all her surroundings. You must know better than any one else whether there was any one connected with her who could have a motive for this crime.'

‘I cannot conceive any reason for the act. I cannot suspect any one person more than another.’

‘Are you positive that your wife had no valuables in her possession—money, for instance?’

‘She spent her money faster than she earned it. We were always in debt. The little jewellery she had ever possessed had been pledged.’

‘Are you sure that she had no valuable jewellery in her possession at the time of her death?’

‘To my knowledge she had none.’

‘That’s curious,’ said Mr. Leopold. ‘I heard a rumour at the time of a diamond necklace, which had been seen round her throat two or three evenings before the murder by the dresser at the theatre. Your wife wore a broad band of black velvet round her neck when she was dressed for the stage, which entirely concealed the diamonds, and it was only by accident the dresser saw them.’

‘This must be a fable,’ said Treverton. ‘My wife never possessed a diamond necklace. She was never in a position to buy one.’

‘She may have been in a position to receive one as a gift,’ suggested Mr. Leopold, quietly

‘She was an honest woman.’

‘Granted. Such gifts are given to honest women. Not often, perhaps, but the thing is possible. Her possession of that diamond necklace may have become known to the murderer, and may have tempted him to the crime.’

Treverton was silent. He remembered his wife’s anonymous admirer, the giver of the bracelet. He had dismissed the man from his thoughts after his interview with the jeweller. No other gifts had appeared, and he had felt no further uneasiness on the subject.

‘Have you thought of all the people in the house?’ asked Mr. Leopold.

John Treverton shrugged his shoulders.

‘What can I think about them? No one in the house could have had any motive for murdering my wife.’

‘It is pretty clear that the murder was not done by any one outside the house,’ said Mr. Leopold, ‘unless, indeed, the street door had been left open in the course of the evening, so as to enable the murderer to slip in quietly, and hide himself until

every one had gone to bed. At what time did your wife generally return from the theatre?’

‘About twelve o’clock; oftener before twelve than after.’

‘The murderer may have followed her into the house. She had a latch key, I suppose?’

‘Yes.’

‘She may have been careless in closing the door, and left it unfastened. It is quite possible that some one may have entered the house after her, and left it quietly when his work was done.’

‘Quite,’ answered Treverton, with a bitter smile. ‘But if we do not know who that some one was, the fact won’t help us.’

‘How about this man who occupied the second floor—this Desrolles? What is he?’

‘A broken-down gentleman,’ answered Treverton, with a troubled look.

He had a peculiar reluctance in speaking of Desrolles.

‘He could not be anything worse,’ said Mr. Leopold, sententiously. ‘This Desrolles was in the

house at the time of the murder. Strange that he should have heard nothing of the struggle.'

'Mrs. Rawber heard nothing, yet she was on the floor below, and was more likely to hear any movement in my wife's room.'

'I should like to know all you can tell me about Desrolles,' said Mr. Leopold, frowning over his pocket-book.

Honest Tom Sampson sat and listened, open eyed and silent. To him the famous criminal lawyer was as a god, a being made up of wisdom and knowledge.

'I can tell you very little,' answered John Treverton. 'I know nothing to his discredit, except that he was poor, and too fond of brandy for his own welfare.'

'I see,' answered Leopold, quickly. 'The kind of man who would do anything for money.'

Treverton started. He could not deny that this was in some wise true of Mr. Desrolles, *alias* Mansfield, *alias* Malcolm. It horrified him to remember that this man was Laura's father, and that at any moment the disgrace of that relationship might be made

known, should Desrolles' presence at the police court be insisted upon. Happily Desrolles was on the other side of the Channel, where only the solicitor who received his income knew where to find him.

Mr. Leopold asked a good many more questions, some of which seemed frivolous and irrelevant, but all of which John Treverton answered as well as he was able.

'I hope you believe in me, Mr. Leopold,' he said, when his solicitor held out his hand at parting.

'From my soul,' answered the other, earnestly. 'And, what's more, I mean to pull you through this. It's a troublesome business, but I think I can see my way to the end of it. I wish you could help me to find Desrolles.'

'That I cannot do,' said Treverton, decidedly.

'It's a pity. Well, good-day. The inquiry is adjourned till next Tuesday, so we have a week before us. It will be hard if we don't do something in that time.'

'The police have done very little in a twelve-month,' said Treverton.

‘The police have not a monopoly of human intelligence,’ answered Mr. Leopold. ‘We may do better than the police.’

Two advertisements appeared in the *Times*, *Telegraph*, and *Standard*, next morning:—

‘DESROLLES.—TEN POUNDS Reward will be given to anybody furnishing the PRESENT ADDRESS of Mr. DESROLLES, late of Cibber Street, Leicester Square.’

‘TO JEWELLERS, PAWNBROKERS, &c. — LOST, in February, 187—, a COLLET NECKLACE of IMITATION DIAMONDS.—Anybody giving information about the same will be liberally rewarded.’

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. EVITT MAKES A REVELATION.

Mrs. EVITT was very ill. It may be that a prolonged residence on a level with the sewers, and remote from the direct rays of the sun, is not conducive to health or good spirits.

Mrs. Evitt had long suffered from a gentle melancholy, an all-pervading dolefulness, which impelled her to hang her head on one side, and to sigh faintly, at intervals, without any apparent motive. She had been also prone to see all the affairs of life in their darkest aspect, as one living, remote from the sun might naturally do. She had been given to prophesy death and doom to her acquaintance, to give a sick friend over directly the doctor was called in, to foresee sheriff's officers and ruin at the slightest indication of extravagance in the management of a neighbour's household, to augur bad things of babies, and worse things of husbands,

to mistrust all mankind, and to perform under her human aspect that ungenial office which the screech owl was supposed to fulfil in a more romantic age.

She had always been ailing. She suffered from vague pains and stitches, and undefinable aches, which took her at awkward angles of her bony frame, or which wracked the innermost recesses of that edifice. She knew a great deal more about her internal economy than is consistent with happiness, and was wont to talk about her liver and other organs with an almost professional technicality. She was not an agreeable companion; but a long succession of lodgers had borne with her, because she was tolerably clean and unscrupulously honest. Upon this last point she prided herself immensely. She knew that she belonged to a maligned and suspected race; nay, that the very name of her calling was synonymous with peculation; and her soul swelled with pride as she declared that she had never wronged a lodger by so much as a crust of bread. She would let a mutton bone rot in her larder rather than appropriate the barest shank without express permission. Rashers of bacon,

half-pounds of Dorset, lard, flour, eggs, were as safe in her care as bullion in the Bank of England.

George Gerard, to whom every penny was of consequence, had discovered this sovereign virtue in his landlady, and honoured her for it. He had suffered much from the harpies with whom he had dwelt in the city. He found his half-pound of tea or coffee last twice as long as in former lodgings ; his rasher of bacon less costly ; his mutton-chop better cooked ; his loaf respected. For him Mrs. Evitt was a model landlady ; and he rewarded her integrity by such small civilities as lay in his power. What gratified her most was his readiness to prescribe for those ailments which were the most salient feature of her life. Her mind had a natural bent towards medicine, and she loved to talk to the good-natured surgeon of her disorders, or even to question him about his patients.

‘ That’s a bad case of small-pox you’ve got in Green Street, isn’t it, Mr. Gerard ? ’ she would say to him, with a dismal relish, when she came in after his day’s work to ask what she ought to do for that ‘ grumbling ’ pain in her back.

‘Who told you it was smallpox?’ asked Gerard.

‘Well, I had it from very good authority. The charwoman that works at number seven in this street is own sister to Mrs. Jewell’s Mary Ann, and Mrs. Jewell and Mrs. Peacock in Green Street is bosom friends, and the house where you’re attending is exackerly opposite Mr. Peacock’s.’

‘Excellent authority,’ answered Gerard, smiling, ‘but I am happy to tell you I haven’t a case of small-pox on my list. Did you ever hear of such a thing as rheumatic fever?’

‘Hear of it,’ echoed Mrs. Evitt, rapturously. ‘I’ve been down with it seven times.’

She looked very hard at him as she made the assertion, as if not expecting to be believed.

‘Have you?’ said Gerard. ‘Then I wonder you’re alive.’

‘That’s what I wonder at myself,’ answered Mrs. Evitt, with subdued pride. ‘I must have had a splendid constitution to go through all I’ve gone through, and to be here to tell it. The quinsies I’ve had. Why the mustard that’s been put to my throat in the form of poultices would stock a first-

rate tea-grocer with the article. As to fever, I don't think you could name the kind I haven't had since I had the scarlatina at five months old, and the whooping-cough a top of the measles before I'd got over it. I've been a martyr.'

'I'm afraid that damp kitchen of yours has had something to do with it,' suggested Gerard.

'Damp!' cried Mrs. Evitt, casting up her hands. 'You never made a greater mistake in your life, Mr. Gerard, than when you threw out such a remark. There ain't a dryer room in London. No, Mr. Gerard, it ain't damp, it's sensitiveness. I'm a regular sensitive plant; and if there's disease going about I take it. That's why I asked you if the smallpox was in Green Street. I don't want to be disfigured in my old age.'

Mr. Gerard looked upon Mrs. Evitt's ailments as in a large degree imaginary, but he found her weak and overworked, and gave her a gentle course of quinine, ill as he could afford to supply her with so expensive a tonic. For some time the quinine had a restorative effect, and Mrs. Evitt thought her lodger the first man in his profession. That young

man understood her constitution as nobody else had ever understood it, she told her gossips, and that young man would make his way. A doctor who had understood a constitution which had hitherto baffled the faculty was bound to achieve greatness. Unfortunately, the good effect of Gerard's prescription was not lasting. There was a good deal of wet and foggy weather at the close of the old year and at the beginning of the new year; and the damp and fog crept into Mrs. Evitt's kitchen, and seemed to take hold of her hard-worked old bones. She exhibited some very fine examples of shivering—her teeth chattered, her complexion turned blue with cold. Even three pennyworth of best unsweetened gin, taken in half a tumbler of boiling water, failed to comfort or exhilarate her.

“I'm afraid I'm in for it,” Mrs. Evitt exclaimed to a neighbour, who had dropped in to pass the time of day and borrow an Italian iron. ‘And this time it's ague.’

And then, forcing the attack a little for the benefit of the neighbour, she set up one of those dreadful shivering fits, which rattled all the teeth in her head.

‘It’s ague this time,’ she repeated, when the shivering had abated. ‘I never had ague until now.’

‘Nonsense,’ cried the neighbour, with an assumption of cheerfulness. ‘It ain’t ague. Lord bless you, people don’t have ague in the heart of London, in a warm comfortable kitchen like this. It’s only in marshes and such like places that you hear of ague.’

‘Never you mind,’ retorted Mrs. Evitt, solemnly. ‘I’ve got the ague, and if Mr. Gerard doesn’t say as much when he comes home, he isn’t the clever man I think him.’

Mr. Gerard came home in due course, letting himself in quietly with his latch-key, soon after dark. Mrs. Evitt managed to crawl upstairs with a tray, carrying a mutton-chop, a loaf, and a pat of butter. To cook the chop had cost her an effort, and it was as much as she could do to drag her weary limbs upstairs.

‘Why, what’s the matter with you to-night, Mrs. Bouncer?’ asked Gerard, who had given his landlady that classic name. ‘You’re looking very queer.’

‘I know I am,’ answered Mrs. Evitt, with gloomy resignation. ‘I’ve got the ague.’

‘Ague, nonsense!’ cried Gerard, rising and feeling her pulse. ‘Let’s look at your tongue, old lady. That’ll do. I’ll soon set you on your legs again, if you do what I tell you.’

‘What is that?’

‘Get to bed, and stay there till you’re well. You’re not fit to be slaving about the house, my good soul. You must get to bed and keep yourself warm, and have some one to feed you with good soup and arrowroot, and such like.’

‘Who’s to look after the house?’ asked Mrs. Evitt, dismally. ‘I shall be ruined.’

‘No, you won’t. I’m your only lodger just now.’ Mrs. Evitt sighed, dolefully. ‘And I want very little waiting upon. You’ll want some one to wait upon you, though. You’d better get a charwoman.’

‘Eighteenpence a day, three substantial meals, and a pint of beer,’ sighed Mrs. Evitt. ‘I should be eat out of house and home. If I must lay up, Mr. Gerard, I’ll get a girl. I know of a decent

girl that would come for her vittles, and a trifle at the end of the week.'

'Ah,' said Gerard, 'there are a good many decent young men walking the streets of London, who would go anywhere for their victuals. Life's a harder problem than any proposition in Euclid, my worthy Bouncer.'

The landlady shook her head in melancholy assent.

'Now look here, my good soul,' said Gerard, seriously. 'If you want to get well, you mustn't sleep in that kennel of yours down below.'

'Kennel!' cried the outraged matron, 'kennel! Mr. Gerard. Why, you might eat your dinner off the floor.'

'I dare say you might; but every breath you draw there is tainted more or less with sewer gas. That furred tongue of yours looks rather like blood-poisoning. You must make yourself up a comfortable bed on the first floor, and keep a nice little bit of fire in your room day and night.'

'Not in *her* room, Mr. Gerard,' exclaimed Mrs. Evitt, with a shudder. 'I couldn't do it, sir. It isn't like as if I was a stranger. Strangers wouldn't

feel it. But I knew her. I should see her beautiful eyes glaring at me all night long. It would be the death of me.'

'Well, then, there's Desrolles' room. You can't have any objection to that.'

Mrs. Evitt shuddered again.

'I'm that nervous,' she said, 'that my mind's set against those upstairs rooms.'

'You'll never get well downstairs. If you don't fancy that first floor bedroom you can make yourself up a bed in the sitting-room. There's plenty of light and air there.'

'I might do that,' said Mrs. Evitt, 'though it goes against me to 'ack my beautiful drawring-room——'

'You won't hurt your drawing-room. You have to recover your health.'

'Ealth is a blessed privilege. Well, I'll put up a truckle bed in the first floor front. The girl could sleep on a mattress on the floor at the bottom of my bed. She'd be company.'

'Of course she would. Make yourself comfortable mentally and bodily, and you'll soon get

well. Now, how about this girl? You must get her immediately.'

'I've got a neighbour coming in presently. I'll get her to step round and tell Jemima to come.'

'Is Jemima the girl?'

'Yes. She's step-daughter to the tailor at the corner of Cricket's Row. He's got a fine family of his own, and Jemima feels herself one too many. She's a hard working honest-minded girl, though she isn't much to look at. Her father was in the public line; he was barman at the Prince of Wales', and the stepfather throws it at her sometimes when he's in drink.'

'Never mind Jemima's biography,' said Gerard. 'Get your neighbour to fetch her, and in the meantime I'll help you to make up the bed.'

'Lor', Mr. Gerard, you haven't had your tea. Your chop will be stone cold.'

'My chop must wait,' said Gerard, cheerily. And then, with all the handiness of a woman, and more than the kindness of an ordinary woman, the young surgeon helped to transform the first floor sitting-room into a comfortable bed-chamber.

By the time this was done Jemima had arrived upon the scene, carrying all her worldly goods tied up in a cotton handkerchief. She was a raw-boned, angular girl, deeply marked with the small pox. Her scanty hair was twisted into a knot like a ball of cotton at the back of her head; her elbows were preternaturally red, her wrists were bound up with rusty black ribbon; but she had a good-natured grin that atoned for everything. She was as patient as a beast of burden, contented with the scantiest fare, invariably cheerful. She was so accustomed to harsh words and hard usage that she thought people who did not bully or maltreat her the quintessence of kindness.

It was on the evening when Mrs. Evitt took to her bed, and the house was entrusted to the care of Jemima, that Mr. Leopold and Mr. Sampson came to make their inquiries at the house in Cibber-street. George Gerard saw them, and heard of John Treverton's arrest, with considerable surprise and some indignation. He felt assured that Edward Clare must have given the information upon which the police had acted; and he felt angry with himself for having been in some-

wise a catspaw to serve the young man's malice. He remembered Laura's lovely face, with its expression of perfect purity and truth ; and he hated himself for having helped to bring this terrible grief upon her.

'There was a time when I believed John Treverton guilty,' he told Mr. Leopold, 'but I have wavered in my opinion ever since last Sunday week, when he and I talked together.'

'You never would have thought badly of him if you had known him as well as I do,' said the faithful Sampson. 'He has stayed for a week at a stretch in my house, you know. We have been like brothers. This is an awkward business, and of course it's very painful for that sweet young wife of his. But Mr. Leopold means to pull him through.'

'I do,' assented the famous lawyer.

'Mr. Leopold has pulled a great many through, innocent and guilty.'

'And guilty,' assented the lawyer, with quiet self-approval.

He was disappointed at not being able to see Mrs. Evitt.

‘I should like to have asked her a few questions,’ he said.

‘She is much too ill to-night for that kind of thing,’ answered Gerard. ‘Her only chance of recovery is to be kept quiet; and I don’t think she can tell you any more about the murder than she stated at the inquest.’

‘Oh, yes, she could,’ said Mr. Leopold. ‘She would tell me a great deal more.’

‘Do you think she kept anything back?’

‘Not intentionally perhaps, but there is always something untold; some small detail, which to your mind might mean nothing, but which might mean a great deal to me. Please let me know directly I can see your landlady.’

Gerard promised, and then Mr. Leopold, instead of taking his departure, made himself quite at home in the surgeon’s arm-chair, and stirred the small fire with so reckless a hand that poor Gerard trembled for his weekly hundred of coals. The solicitor seemed in an idle humour, and inclined to waste time. Honest Tom Sampson wondered at his frivolity.

The conversation naturally turned upon the deed which had given that house a sinister notoriety. Gerard found himself talking freely of Madame Chicot and her husband; and it was only after Mr. Leopold and his companion had gone that he perceived how cleverly the experienced lawyer had contrived to cross-question him, without his being aware of the process.

After this evening Gerard watched the newspapers for any report of the Chicot case. He read of John Treverton's appearance at Bow Street, and saw that the inquiry had been adjourned for a week. At Mrs. Evitt's particular request he read the report of the case in the evening papers on the night after the inquiry. She seemed full of anxiety about the business.

‘Do you think they’ll hang him?’ she asked, eagerly.

‘My good soul, they’ve a long way to go before they get to hanging. He is not even committed for trial.’

‘But it looks black against him, doesn’t it?’

‘Circumstances certainly appear to point to him

as the murderer. You see there seems to be no one else who could have had any motive for such an act.'

'And you say he has got a sweet young wife.'

'One of the loveliest women I ever saw; I feel very sorry for her, poor soul.'

'If you was on the jury, would you bring him in guilty?' asked Mrs. Evitt.

'I should be sorely perplexed. You see, I should be called upon to find my verdict according to the evidence, and the evidence against him is very strong.'

Mrs. Evitt sighed, and turned her weary head upon her pillow.

'Poor young man,' she murmured, 'he was always affable—not very free spoken, but always affable. I should feel sorry if it went against him. It would be awful, wouldn't it,' she exclaimed, with sudden agitation, lifting herself up from her pillow, and gazing fixedly at the surgeon; 'it would be awful for him to be hung, and innocent all the time; and a sweet young wife, too. I couldn't bear

it ; no, I couldn't bear it. The thought of it would weigh me down to my grave, and I don't suppose it would let me rest even there.'

Gerard thought the poor woman was getting delirious. He laid his fingers gently on her skinny wrist, and held them there while he looked at his watch.

Yes, the pulse was a good deal quicker than it had been when he last felt it.

'Is Jemima there ?' asked Mrs. Evitt, twitching aside the bed-curtain, and looking nervously round.

Yes, Jemima was there, sitting before the fire, darning a coarse grey stocking, and feeling very happy in being allowed to bask in the warmth of a fire, in a room where nobody threw saucepan lids at her.

George Gerard had rigged up what he called a jury curtain, to shelter the truckle bed from those piercing currents of air which find their way alike through old and new window frames.

Mrs. Evitt's thin fingers suddenly fastened like claws upon the surgeon's wrist.

'I want to speak to you,' she whispered,

‘by-and-by, when Jemima’s gone down to her supper. I can’t keep it any longer. It’s preying on my vitals.’

The delirium was evidently increasing, thought Gerard. There was generally this exacerbation of the fever at nightfall.

‘What is it you can’t keep?’ he asked, soothingly. ‘Is there anything that worries you?’

‘Wait till Jemima has gone down,’ whispered the invalid.

‘I’ll come up and have a look at you between ten and eleven,’ said Gerard, aloud, rising to go. ‘I’ve a lot of reading to get through this evening.’

He went down to his books and his tranquil solitude, pondering upon Mrs. Evitt’s speech and manner. No, it was not delirium. The woman’s words were too consecutive for delirium; her manner was excited, but not wild. There was evidently something on her mind—something connected with La Chicot’s murder.

Great Heaven, could this feeble old woman be the assassin? Could those withered old hands have inflicted that mortal gash? No, the idea was not to

be entertained for a moment. Yet, stranger things have been since the world began. Crime, like madness, might give a factitious strength to feeble hands. La Chicot might have had money—jewels—hidden wealth of some kind, of which the secret was known to her landlady, and, tempted by direst poverty, this wretched woman might——! The thought was too horrible. It took possession of George Gerard's brain like a nightmare. Vainly did he endeavour to beguile his mind by the study of an interesting treatise on dry-rot in the metatarsal bone. His thoughts were with that feeble old woman upstairs, whose skinny hand, just now, had set him thinking of the witches in Macbeth.

He listened for Jemima's clumping footfall going downstairs. It came at last, and he knew that the girl was gone to her meagre supper, and the coast was clear for Mrs. Evitt's revelation. He shut his book, and went quietly upstairs. Never until now had George Gerard known the meaning of fear; but it was with actual fear that he entered Mrs. Evitt's room, dreading the discovery he was going to make.

He was startled at finding the invalid risen, and

with her dingy black stuff gown drawn on over her night-gear.

‘Why in heaven’s name did you get up?’ he asked. ‘If you were to take cold you would be ever so much worse than you have been yet.’

‘I know it,’ answered Mrs. Evitt, with her teeth chattering, ‘but I can’t help that. I’ve got to go upstairs to the second floor back, and you must go with me.’

‘What for?’

‘I’ll tell you that presently. I want you to tell me something first.’

Gerard took a blanket off the bed, and wrapped it round the old woman’s shoulders. She was sitting in front of the fire, just where Jemima had sat darning her stocking.

‘I’ll tell you anything you like,’ answered Gerard, ‘but I shall be very savage if you catch cold.’

‘If an innocent person was suspected of a murder, and the evidence was strong against him, and another person knew he hadn’t done it, and said nothing, and let the law take its course, would the other person be guilty?’

‘Of murder!’ cried Gerard; ‘of nothing less than murder. Having the power to save an innocent life, and not saving it! What could that be but murder!’

‘Are you sure Jemima isn’t outside, on the listen?’ asked Mrs. Evitt, suspiciously. ‘Just go to the door and look.’

Gerard obeyed.

‘There’s not a mortal within earshot,’ he said. ‘Now, my good soul, don’t waste any more time. It’s evident you know all about this murder.’

‘I believe I know who did it,’ said the old woman.

‘Who?’

‘I can remember that awful night as well as if it was yesterday,’ began Mrs. Evitt, making strange swallowing noises, as if to keep down her agitation. ‘There we all stood on the landing outside this door—Mrs. Rawber, Mr. Desrolles, me, and Mr. Chicot. Mrs. Rawber and me was all of a twitter. Mr. Chicot looked as white as a ghost; Mr. Desrolles was the coolest among us. He took it all quiet enough, and I felt it was a comfort to have somebody there that

had his wits about him. It was him that proposed sending for a policeman.'

'Sensible enough,' said Gerard.

'Nothing was further from my thoughts than to suspect him,' pursued Mrs. Evitt. 'He had been with me, off and on, for five years, and he'd been a quiet lodger, coming in at his own time with his own key, and giving very little trouble. He had only one fault, and that was his liking for the bottle. He and Madame Chicot had been very friendly. He seemed to take quite a fatherly care of her, and had brought her home from the theatre many a night, when her husband was at his club.'

'Yes, yes,' cried Gerard, impatiently. 'You've told me that often before to-night. Go on, for heaven's sake. Do you mean to say that Desrolles had anything to do with the murder?'

'He did it,' said Mrs. Evitt, whispering into the surgeon's ear.

'How do you know? What ground have you for accusing him?'

'The best of grounds. There was a struggle between that poor creature and her murderer.

When I went in to look at her as she lay there, before the doctor had touched her, one of her hands was clenched tight—as if she had clutched at something in her last gasp. In that clenched hand I found a tuft of iron-gray hair—just the colour of Desrolles' hair. I could swear to it.'

'Is that all your evidence against Desrolles? The fact is strongly in favour of poor Treverton, and you were a wicked woman not to reveal it at the inquest; but you cannot condemn Desrolles upon the strength of a few gray hairs, unless you know of other evidence against him.'

'I do,' said Mrs. Evitt. 'Dreadful evidence. But don't say that I was a wicked woman because I didn't tell it at the inquest. There was nobody's life in danger. Mr. Chicot had got safe off. Why should I up and tell that which would hang Mr. Desrolles. He had always been a good lodger to me; and though I could never look at him after that time without feeling every drop of blood in my veins turned to ice, and though I was thankful to Providence when he left me, it wasn't in me to tell that which would be his death.'

‘Go on,’ urged Gerard. ‘What was it you discovered?’

‘When the policeman had come in and looked about him, Mr. Desrolles says, “I shall go to bed; I ain’t wanted no more here,” and he goes back to his room, as quiet and as cool as if nothing had happened. When the sergeant came back half an hour afterwards, with a gentleman in plain clothes, which was neither more nor less than a detective, them two went into every room in the house. I went with them to show the way, and to open cupboards and such like. They went up into Mr. Desrolles’ room, and he was sleeping like a lamb. He grumbled a bit at us for disturbing him. “Look about as much as you like,” he said, “as long as you don’t worry me. Open all the drawers. You won’t find any of ’em locked. I haven’t a very extensive wardrobe. I can keep count of my clothes without an inventory.” “A very pleasant gentleman,” said the detective afterwards.”’

‘Did they find nothing?’ asked Gerard.

‘Nothing, yet they looked and pried about very

careful. There's only one closet in the second-floor back, and that's behind the head of the bed. The bed's a tent, with chintz curtains all round. They looked under the bed, and they even went so far as to move the chimney board and look up the chimney ; but they didn't move the bed. I suppose they didn't want to disturb Mr. Desrolles, who had curled himself up in the bed-clothes and gone off to sleep again. ' I suppose there ain't no cupboards in this room ? ' says the detective. I was that tired of dancing attendance upon them, that I just gave my head a shake that might mean anything, and they went downstairs to the parlours to worrit Mrs. Rawber.'

Here Mrs. Evitt paused, as if exhausted by much speech.

' Come, old lady,' said Gerard kindly, ' take a little of this barley water, and then go on. You are keeping me on tenter hooks.'

Mrs. Evitt drank, gasped two or three times, and continued—

' I don't know what put it into my head, but after the two men was gone I couldn't help thinking

about that cupboard, and whether there mightn't be something in it that the detective would like to have found. Mr. Desrolles came downstairs at eleven o'clock, and went out to get his breakfast—as he called it,—but I knew pretty well when he went out of doors for his breakfast, he breakfasted upon brandy. If he wanted a cup of tea or a bloater, I got it for him; but there was mornings when he hadn't appetite to pick a bit of bloater with a slice of bread and butter, and then he went out of doors.'

'Yes, yes,' assented Gerard, 'pray go on.'

'When he was gone I put up the chain of the front door, so as to make sure of not being disturbed, and I went straight up to his room. I moved the bedstead, and opened the cupboard door. Mr. Desrolles had no key to the cupboard, for the key was lost when he first came to me, and though it had turned up afterwards, I hadn't troubled to give it him. What did he want with keys, when all the property he had in the world wasn't worth a five-pound note?'

'Go on, there's a good soul.'

‘I opened the cupboard. It was a queer, old-fashioned closet in the wall, and the door was papered over just the same as the room. It was so dark inside that I had to light a candle before I could see anything there. There was not much to see at first, even with the candle, but I went down upon my knees, and hunted in the dark corners, and at last I found Mr. Desrolles’ old chintz dressing-gown, rolled up small, and stuffed into the darkest corner of the cupboard, under a lot of rubbish. He had been wearing it only a day or two before, and I knew it as well as I knew him. I took it over to the window and unfolded it; and there was the evidence that told who had murdered that poor creature lying cold on her bed in the room below. The front of the dressing gown and one of the sleeves were soaked in blood. It must have flowed in torrents. The stains were hardly dry. ‘Good Lord!’ says I to myself, ‘this would hang him,’ and I takes and rolls the gown up tight, and puts it back in the corner, and covers it over with other things, old newspapers and old clothes, and such like, just as it was before. And then I runs

downstairs and routs out the key of the closet, and takes and locks it. I was all of a tremble while I did it, but I felt there was a power within me to do it. I had but just put the key in my pocket when there came a loud knocking downstairs. From the time Mr. Desrolles had gone out it wasn't quite a quarter of an hour, but I felt pretty sure this was him come back again. I pushed back the bed, and ran down to the door, still trembling inwardly. "What the—— (wicked word)—" "did you put the chain up for?" he asked, angrily, for it was him. I told him that I felt that nervous after last night that I was obliged to do it. He smelt strong of brandy, and I thought that he was looking strange, like a man that feels all queer in his inside, and struggles not to show it. "I suppose I must put myself into a clean shirt for this inquest," he says, and then he goes upstairs, and I wonders to myself how he feels as he goes by the door where that poor thing lies.'

'Did he never ask you for the key of the closet?'

'Never. Whether he guessed what had hap-

pened, and knew that I suspected him, I can't tell—but he never asked no questions, and the closet has been locked up to this day, and I've got the key, and if you will come upstairs with me I'll show you what I saw that dreadful morning.'

'No, no, there's no need for that. The police are the people who must see the inside of that closet. It's a strange business,' said Gerard, 'but I'm more glad than I can say for Treverton's sake, and for the sake of his lovely young wife. What motive could this Desrolles have had for such a brutal murder?'

Mrs. Evitt shook her head solemnly.

'That's what I never could make out,' she said, 'though I've lain awake many a night puzzling myself over it. I know she hadn't no money—I know that him and her was always friendly, up to the last day of her life. But I've got my idea about it.'

'What is your idea?'

asked Gerard.

'That it was done when he was out of his mind with *delirious tremings*.'

‘But have you ever seen him mad from the effects of drink?’

‘No, never. But how can we tell that it didn’t come upon him sudden in the dead of the night, and work upon him until he got up and rushed downstairs in his madness, and cut that poor thing’s throat.’

‘That’s too wild an idea. That a man should be raging mad with *delirium tremens* between twelve and one o’clock, and perfectly sane at three, is hardly within the range of possibility. No. There must have been a motive, though we cannot fathom it. Well, I thank God that conscience has impelled you to tell the truth at last, late as it is. I shall get you to repeat this statement to Mr. Leopold to-morrow. And now get back to bed, and I’ll send Jemima up to you with a cup of good beef tea. God grant that this fellow Desrolles may be found.’

‘I hope not,’ said Mrs. Evitt. ‘If they find him they’ll hang him, and he was always a good lodger to me. I’m bound to speak of him as I found him.’

‘You wouldn’t speak very well of him if you had found him at your throat with a razor.’

‘Ah,’ replied the landlady, ‘I lived in fear and dread of him ever after that horrid time. I’ve woke up in a cold perspiration many a time, fancying that I heard his breathing close beside my bed, though I always slept with my door locked and the kitching table pushed against it. I was right down thankful when he went away, though it was hard upon me to have my second-floor empty—and Queen’s taxes, and all my rates coming in just as regular as when my house was full.’

Gerard insisted on his patient going to bed without further delay. She was flushed and excited by her own revelations, and would have willingly gone on talking till midnight, if her doctor had allowed it. But he wished her good-night, and went downstairs to summon the well-meaning Jemima, who was a very good sick nurse, having ministered to a large family of stepbrothers and stepsisters, through teething, measles, chicken-pox, mumps, and all the ills that infant flesh is heir to.

George Gerard communicated early next day

with Mr. Leopold, and that gentleman came at once to Mrs. Evitt's bedside, where he had a long and friendly conversation with that lady, who was well enough to be inordinately loquacious. She was quite fascinated by the famous lawyer, whose manners seemed to her the perfection of courtesy, and she remarked afterwards that if her own neck had been in peril she could hardly have refused to answer any questions he asked her.

Once master of his facts, at first hand, Mr. Leopold called a hansom, and drove to the shady retreat where his client was languishing in duurance. Laura was with her husband when the lawyer came. She started up, pale and agitated, at his entrance, looking to him as the one man who was to save an innocent life.

‘Good news,’ said Leopold, cheerily.

‘Thank God,’ murmured Laura, sinking back in her chair.

‘We have found the murderer.’

‘Found him,’ cried Treverton; ‘how, and where?’

‘When I say found, I go rather too far,’ said

Leopold, 'but we know who he is. It's the man I suspected from the beginning—your second-floor lodger, Desrolles.'

Laura gave a cry of horror.

'You need not pity him, Mrs. Treverton,' said Mr. Leopold. 'He's a thorough-paced scoundrel. I happen to be acquainted with circumstances that throw a light upon his motive for the murder. He is quite unworthy of your compassion. I doubt if hanging—in the gentlemanly way in which it's done now—is bad enough for him. He ought to have lived in a less refined age, when he would have had his last moments enlivened by the yells and profanity of the populace.'

'How do you know that Desrolles was the murderer?' asked John Treverton.

Mr. Leopold told his client the gist of Mrs. Evitt's statement.

Treverton listened in silence. Laura sat quietly by, white as marble.

'The young surgeon in Cibber Street tells me that Mrs. Evitt will be well enough to appear in court next Tuesday,' said Mr. Leopold, in conclu-

sion. 'If she isn't, we must ask for another adjournment. I think you may consider that you're out of it. It would be impossible for any magistrate to commit you, in the face of this woman's evidence; but Desrolles will have to be found all the same, and the sooner he's found the better. I shall set the police on his track immediately. Don't look so frightened, Mrs. Treverton. The only way to prove your husband's innocence is to show that some one else is guilty. I wish you could help me with any information that would put the police on the right scent,' he added, turning to John Treverton.

'I told you yesterday that I could not help you.'

'Yes, but your manner gave me the idea that you were keeping back something. That you could—an' if you would—have given me a clue.'

'Your imagination—despite the grim realism of police courts—must be very lively.'

'Ah, I see,' said Mr. Leopold, 'you mean to stick to your text. Well, this fellow must be found somehow, whether you like it or not. Your

good name depends upon our getting somebody convicted.'

'Yes,' cried Laura, starting up, and speaking with sudden energy, 'my husband's good name must be saved at any cost. What is this man to us, John, that we should spare him? What is he to me that his safety should be considered before yours?'

'Hush, dearest!' said John, soothingly. 'Let Mr. Leopold and me manage this business between us.'

CHAPTER XII.

THE UNDERTAKER'S EVIDENCE.

‘MY father,’ cried Laura, when Mr. Leopold had taken his departure, and she and her husband were left alone, ‘my father guilty of this cruel murder! A crime of the vilest kind, without a shadow of excuse. And to think that this man’s blood flows in my veins, that your wife is the daughter of a murderer. Oh, John, it is too terrible! You must hate me. You must shrink from me with loathing.’

‘Dear love, if you had descended from a long line of criminals, you would still be to me what you have been from the first hour I knew you, the purest, the dearest, the loveliest, the best of women. But as to this scoundrel Desrolles, who imposed on your youth and inexperience—who stole into your benefactor’s gardens like a thief, seeking only gain—who extorted from your generous young heart a pity he did not deserve, and robbed you of your

money,—I no more believe that he is your father than that he is mine. While his claim upon you meant no more than an annuity which it cost us no sacrifice to give, I was too careless to trouble myself about his credentials. But now that he stands revealed as the murderer of that unfortunate woman, it is our business to explode his specious tale. Will you help to do this, Laura? I can do nothing but advise, while I am tied hand and foot in this wretched place.'

'I will do anything, dearest, anything to prove that this hateful man is not the father I lived with when I was a little child. Only tell me what I ought to do.'

'The first thing to be done is to go down to Chiswick, and make inquiries there. Do you think you could find the house in which you lived, supposing that it is still standing?'

'I think I could. It was in a very dull, out-of-the-way place. I can just remember that. It was called Ivy Cottage, and it was in a lane where there was never anything to be seen from the windows.'

‘Very well, darling, what you have to do is to go down to Chiswick with Sampson—we can afford to trust him with all our secrets, for he’s as true as steel—see if you can find the particular Ivy Cottage we want,—I dare say there are half-a-dozen Ivy Cottages in Chiswick, all looking out upon nothing particular,—and then discover all you can about your father’s residence in that house, and how and when he quitted it.’

‘I will go to-day, John. Why should Mr. Sampson go with me? I am not afraid of going alone.’

‘No, dear, I could not bear that. You must have our good Sampson to take care of you. He is as sharp as a needle, and, in a country where he is not tongue-tied, will be very useful. He will be here in a few minutes, and then you and he can start for Chiswick as soon as you like.’

Half-an-hour later, Laura and Mr. Sampson were seated in a railway carriage on their way to Chiswick; and in less than an hour from the time she left Clerkenwell Laura was looking wonderingly at the lanes with which her infancy had been familiar.

There had been great changes, and she wandered about for a long time, unable to recognise a single feature in the scene, except always the river, which looked at her through the grey mistiness of a winter afternoon, like an old friend. Terraces had been built; villas, of startling newness, stared her in the face in every direction. Where erst had been a rustic lane there was all the teeming life of a factory.

‘Surely this cannot be Chiswick!’ exclaimed Laura.

Yes, there was the good old church, looking sober, gray, and rustic as of old; and here was the village, but little changed. Laura and her companion rambled on till they left the new terraces and stuccoed villas behind them, and came at last to a bit of the ancient world, quiet, dull, lonely, as if it had been left forgotten on the bank of the swift-rolling river of Time.

‘It must have been hereabouts we lived,’ said Laura.

It was a very dreary lane. There were half-a-dozen scattered houses, some of which had a

blind look, presenting a blank wall, pierced by an odd window and a door, to the passer-by. These were the more aristocratic habitations, and had garden fronts looking the other way. A little further on the explorers came to a square, uncompromising looking cottage, with a green door, a bright brass knocker, and five prim windows looking into the lane. It was a cottage that must have looked exactly the same a hundred and twenty years ago, when Hogarth was living and working hard by.

‘That is the house we lived in!’ cried Laura. ‘Yes, I am sure of it. I remember those hard-looking windows, staring straight into the lane. I used to envy the children in the house further on, because they had a garden—only a little bit of garden—but just enough for flowers to grow in. There was only a stone yard, with a pump in it, at the back of our house, and not a single flower.’

‘Had you the whole house, do you think?’ asked Sampson.

‘I am sure we had not, because we were so afraid to take liberties in it. I remember my

poor mother often telling me to be very quiet, because Miss Somebody—I haven't the faintest recollection of her name—was very particular. I was dreadfully afraid of Miss Somebody. She was tall, and straight, and old, and she always wore a black gown and a black cap. I would not for the world have done anything to offend her. She kept the house very clean—too clean, I've heard my father say—for she was always about the stairs and passages, on her knees, with a pail beside her. I have often narrowly escaped tumbling into that pail.'

'I wonder if she's alive still,' said Sampson; 'the house looks as if it was in the occupation of a maiden lady. I dare say my sister's house will look like that, when she has set up house-keeping on her own account.'

He lifted the brass knocker and gave a loudish knock. The door was opened almost immediately by a puffy widow, who had a chubby boy of three or four years old clinging to her skirts. The widow was very civil, and willing to answer any questions that might be asked her, but she

could not give them the information they wanted. She begged them to come into her parlour, and she was profuse in her offer of chairs; but she was not the Miss Somebody whom Laura remembered.

That stern damsel, whose name was Fry, after occupying Ivy Cottage with honour to herself and credit to the parish for eight and thirty years, had been called to her forefathers just one little year ago, and was taking her rest, after an industrious career, in the quiet old churchyard where the great English painter and satirist lies. She had left no record of a long line of lodgers, and the amiable widow who had taken Ivy Cottage immediately after Miss Fry's death was not even furnished with any traditions about the people who had lived and died in the rooms now hers. She could only reiterate that Miss Fry had been a most respectable lady, that she had paid her way, and left the cottage in good repair, and she hoped that she, Mrs. Pew, would continue to deserve those favours which the public had lavishly bestowed upon her predecessor. If the

lady and gentleman should hear of any party wanting quiet lodgings in a rural neighbourhood, within a quarter of an hour's walk of the station, Mrs. Pew would consider it a great kindness if they would name her to the party in question. She would have a parlour, with bedroom over, vacant on the following Saturday.

Sampson promised to carry the fact in his mind. Laura thanked the widow for her civility, and gave the chubby boy half-a-crown, a gift which was much appreciated by the mother, who impounded it directly the door was shut.

'Johnny shall have twopence to go and buy brandy snaps, he shall,' cried the matron, when her boy set up a howl at this blatant theft; and the prospect of that immediate and sensual gratification pacified the child.

'Failure number one,' said Sampson, when they were out in the lane. 'What are we to do next?'

Laura had not the least idea. She felt how helpless she would have been without the kindly little solicitor; and how wise it had been of her husband to insist upon Mr. Sampson's companionship.

‘We are not going to be flummoxed—excuse the vulgarity of the expression—quite so easily,’ said Sampson. ‘Everybody can’t be dead within the last seventeen years. Why, seventeen years is nothing to a middle-aged man. He scarcely feels himself any older for the lapse of seventeen years; there are a few grey hairs in his whiskers, perhaps, and his waistcoats are a trifle bigger round the waist, and that’s all. There must be somebody in this place who can remember your father. Let me think it out a bit. We want to know if a certain gentleman who was supposed by old Mr. Treverton to have died here, did really die, or whether he recovered and left the place, as a certain party asserts. All the probabilities are in favour of the one fact; and we have only the word of a very doubtful character for the other. Let me see, now, Mrs. Treverton, where shall we make our next inquiry? At the doctor’s? Well, you see, there are a dozen doctors in such a place as this, I dare say. At the undertaker’s? Yes, that’s it. Undertakers are long-lived men. We’ll look in upon the oldest established undertaker in the

village. If your father died in this place, somebody must have buried him, and the record of his funeral will be in the undertaker's books. But before I begin this business, which may be rather tedious, I should like to put you into a train, and send you back to London, Mrs. Treverton. A cab will take you from the station to your lodgings. You are looking pale and tired.'

'No, no,' said Laura, eagerly, 'I am not tired. I had much rather stay. Don't think of me. I have no sense of fatigue.'

Sampson shook his head dubiously, but gave way. They went to the village, and after making sundry inquiries at the post-office, Mr. Sampson and his companion repaired to a quiet, old-fashioned looking shop, in whose dingy window appeared the symbols of the gloomy trade conducted within.

Here they found an old man, who emerged from a workshop in the rear, bringing with him the aromatic odour of elm shavings.

'Come,' said Sampson cheerily, 'you're old enough to remember seventeen years ago. You look like an old inhabitant.'

‘I can remember sixty years ago as well as I can remember yesterday,’ answered the man, ‘and I shall have lived in this house sixty-nine years come July.’

‘You’re the man for us,’ said Sampson. ‘I want you to look up your books for the year 1856, and tell me if you buried Mr. Malcolm, of Ivy Cottage, Markham Lane. You buried Mrs. Malcolm first, you know, and the husband soon followed her. It was a very quiet funeral.’

The undertaker scratched his head thoughtfully, and seemed to retire into the shadow-land of departed years. He ruminated for some minutes.

‘I can find out all about it in my ledger,’ he said, ‘but I’ve a pretty good memory. I don’t like to feel dependent upon books. Ivy Cottage? That was Miss Fry’s house. I buried her a year ago. A very pretty funeral, every thing suitable, and in harmony with the old lady’s character. Some of our oldest tradespeople followed. It was quite a creditable thing.’

Sampson waited hopefully while the old man pondered upon past triumphs in the undertaking line.

‘Let me see, now,’ he said musingly. ‘Ivy Cottage. I’ve done a good bit of business for Ivy Cottage within the last thirty years. I’ve buried—there—I should say, a round dozen of Miss Fry’s tenants. They was mostly elderly folks, with small annuities, who came to Chiswick to finish up their lives; as a quiet old-fashioned place, you see, where they was in nobody’s way. First and last I should say I’ve turned out a round dozen from Ivy Cottage. It was a satisfaction to do things nicely for Miss Fry herself, at the wind up. She’d been a good friend to me, and she wasn’t like the doctors, you know. I couldn’t offer her a commission. Malcolm! Malcolm, husband and wife, I ought to remember that! Yes, I’ve got it! a sweet young lady, seven and twenty at the most, and the husband drooped and died soon afterwards. I remember. She had a very plain funeral, poor dear, for there didn’t seem to be much money, and the husband was the only mourner. We buried him in rather superior style, I recollect; for an old friend had turned up at the last, and there was enough money to pay all the little debts and do things

very nicely, in a quiet way, for the poor gentleman. There were only two mourners in his case, the doctor and an elderly lady from London, who followed in her own carriage. I remember the lady, because she called upon me directly after the funeral, and asked me if I was paid, or sure of being paid, as the deceased was her nephew, and she would be willing to perform this last act of kindness for him. I thought it a very graceful thing for the lady to do.'

'Did she give you her address?' asked Sampson.

'I've a notion that she left her card, and that I copied the address into my book. It would be a likely thing for me to do, for I'm very methodical in my ways; and with a party of that age there's always an interest. She might come to want me herself soon, and might bear it in mind on her death-bed. Well, now I've called upon my memory, I'll look at my ledger.'

He went to a cupboard in a corner of the shop, and took down a volume from a row of tall, narrow books, a series which comprised 'the story of his life from year to year.'

‘Yes,’ he said after turning over a good many leaves, ‘here it is. Mrs. Malcolm, pine, covered black cloth, black nails,——’

‘That’ll do,’ interrupted Sampson, seeing Laura’s distressed look at these details, ‘now we want Mr. Malcolm.’

‘Here he is, three months later. Stephen Malcolm, Esq., polished oak, brass handles,—a very superior article, I remember.’

‘There can be no mistake, I suppose, in an entry of that kind,’ asked Sampson.

‘Mistake!’ cried the undertaker, with an offended air. ‘If you can find a false entry in my books, I’ll forfeit five per cent. upon ten years’ profits.’

‘There can be no doubt, then, that Mr. Stephen Malcolm died at Ivy Cottage, and that you conducted his funeral?’

‘Not the least doubt.’

‘Very well. If you will get me a certified copy of the entry of his death in the parish register, I shall be happy to recompense you for your trouble. The document is required for a

little bit of law business. Is the doctor who attended Mr. Malcolm still living ?'

'No. It was old Dr. Dewsripp. He's dead. But young Dewsripp is alive, and in practice here. He can give you any information you want, I dare say.'

'Thanks. I think if you get me the copy of the register, that will be sufficient. Oh, by the way, you may as well find the old lady's address.'

'Ah, to be sure. As you are interested in the family, you may like to have it; though I dare say the old lady has gone to her long home before now. Some London firm had the job, no doubt. London firms are so pushing, and they contrive to stand so well with the medical profession.'

The address was found—Mrs. Malcolm, 97, Russell Square—and copied by Mr. Sampson, who thanked the old man for his courtesy, and gave him his card, with the Midland Hotel address added in pencil. The short winter day was now closing in, and Sampson felt anxious to get Mrs. Treverton home.

'I might have gone to the parish register in

the first instance,' he said, when they had left the undertaker's, 'but I thought we should get more information out of an old inhabitant, and so we have, for we've heard of this old lady in Russell Square.'

'Yes, I remember spending a week at her house,' said Laura. 'How long ago it all seems. Like the memory of another life.'

'Lor', yes,' said Sampson; 'I remember when I was a little chap, at Dr. Prossford's grammar school, playing chuck farthing. I've often looked back and wondered to think that little chap, in a tight jacket and short trowsers, was an early edition of me.'

'You think the later editions have been improvements on that,' said Laura, smiling.

She was able to smile now. A heavy load had been suddenly lifted from her mind. What infinite relief it was to know that her father had never been the pitiful trickster—the crawling pensioner upon a woman's bounty—that she had been taught to think him. Her heart was full of gratitude to heaven for this discovery—so easily made, and yet of such immeasurable value.

‘Who can that man be?’ she asked herself. ‘He must have been a friend of my father’s, in close companionship with him, or he would hardly have become possessed of my mother’s miniature, and of those letters and papers.’

She determined to go without delay to the house in Russell Square, in the hope—at best but a faint hope—of finding the old lady in black satin still among the living, and not represented by an entry in the ledger of some West-end undertaking firm, or by a number in the dismal catalogue of a suburban cemetery.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN OLD LADY'S DIARY.

ON the following afternoon Laura drove straight from the House of Detention to Russell Square. Her interview with her husband had been full of comfort. Mr. Leopold had been with his client, and Mr. Leopold was in excellent spirits. He had no doubt as to the issue of his case, even without Desrolles ; and the detectives had very little doubt of finding Desrolles.

‘A man of that age and of those habits doesn’t go far,’ said the lawyer, speaking of this human entity with as much assurance as if he were stating a mathematical truth.

Laura got out of her cab before one of the dullest-looking houses in the big, handsome old square—a house brightened by no modern embellishment in the way of Venetian blind or encaustic flower-box, but kept with a scrupulous

care. Not a speck upon the window panes, not a spot upon the snow-white steps, the varnish of the door as fresh as if it had been laid on yesterday.

The door was opened by an old man-servant in plain clothes. Laura grew hopeful at the sight of him. He looked like a man who had lived fifty years in one service—the kind of man who begins as a knife-boy, and either stultifies a spotless career by going to America with the plate, or ends as a pious annuitant, in the odour of sanctity.

‘Does Mrs. Malcolm still live here?’ asked Laura.

‘Yes, ma’am.’

‘Is she at home?’

‘I will inquire, ma’am, if you will be kind enough to give me your card,’ replied the man, as much as to say that his mistress was a lady whose leisure was not to be irreverently disturbed. She was to be at home or not at home, as it pleased her sovereign will, and according to the quality and claims of her visitor.

Laura wrote upon one of her cards, ‘Stephen

Malcolm's daughter, Laura,' while the ancient butler produced a solid old George the Second salver whereon to convey the card with due reverence to his mistress.

The address upon the card looked respectable, and so did Laura, and upon the strength of these appearances the butler ventured to show the stranger into the dining room, where the furniture was of the good old brobdignagian stamp, and there was nothing portable except the fire-irons. Here Laura waited in a charnel-house atmosphere, while Mrs. Malcolm called up the dim shadows of the past, and finally came to the determination that she would hold parley with this young person who claimed to be of her kindred.

The butler came back after a chilly interval, and ushered Mrs. Treverton up the broad, ghastly-looking staircase, where drab walls looked down upon a stone-coloured carpet, to the big, bare drawing-room, which had ever been one of the coldest memories of her childhood.

It was a long and lofty room, furnished with monumental rosewood. The cheffoniers were like

tombs—the sofa suggested an altar—the centre table looked as massive as one of those Druidic *menhirs* which crop up here and there among the wilds of Dartmoor, or the sandy plains of Brittany. A pale-faced clock ticked solemnly on the white marble chimney piece, three tall windows let in narrow streaks of pallid daylight, between voluminous drab curtains.

In this mausoleum-like chamber, beside a dull and miserly-looking fire, sat an old lady in black satin—the very same figure, the very same satin gown, Laura remembered years ago; or a gown so like that it appeared the same.

‘Aunt,’ said Laura, approaching timidly, and feeling as if she were a little child again, and doomed to solitary imprisonment in that awful room, ‘have you forgotten me?’

The old lady in black satin held out her hand, a withered white hand clad in a black mitten, and adorned with old-fashioned rings.

‘No, my dear,’ she replied, without any indication of surprise, ‘I never forget any one or anything. My memory is good, and my sight

and hearing are good. Providence has been very kind to me. Your card puzzled me at first, but when I came to think it over I soon understood who you were. Sit down, my dear. Jonam shall bring you a glass of sherry.'

The old lady rose and rang the bell.

'Please don't, aunt,' said Laura. 'I never take sherry. I don't want anything except to talk with you a little about my poor father.'

'Poor Stephen,' replied Mrs. Malcolm. 'Sadly imprudent, poor fellow. Nobody's enemy but his own. And so you are married, my dear? Never mind, Jonam, my niece will not take anything.' This to the butler. 'You were adopted by an old friend of your father's, I remember. I went to Chiswick the day after poor Stephen's death, and found that you had been taken away. I was very glad to know you were provided for; though, of course, I should have done what I could for you in the way of trying to get you into an institution, or something of that kind. I could never have had a child in this house. Children upset everything. I hope

your father's friend has carried out his undertaking handsomely ?'

'He was all goodness,' answered Laura. 'He was more than a father to me. But I lost him two years ago.'

'I hope he left you independent ?'

'He made me independent by a deed of trust, when I first went to him. He settled six thousand pounds for my benefit.'

'Very handsome indeed. And pray whom have you married ?'

'My benefactor's nephew, and the inheritor of his estate.'

'You have been a very lucky girl, Laura, and you ought to be thankful to God.'

'I hope I am thankful.'

'I have often noticed that the children of improvident fathers do better in life than those whose parents toil to make them independent. They are like the ravens—Providence takes care of them. Well, my dear, I congratulate you.'

'God has been very good to me, dear aunt, but I have had many troubles. I want you to

tell me about my father. Did you see much of him in the last years of his life ?'

'Not very much. He used to call upon me occasionally, and he used sometimes to bring your mother to spend the day with me. She was a sweet woman--you are like her in face and figure--and she and I used to get on very nicely together. She was not above taking advice.'

'Had my father many friends and acquaintances at that time ?' asked Laura.

'Many friends ! My dear, he was poor.'

'Do you know if he had any one particular friend ? He could not have been quite alone in the world. I recollect there was a gentleman who used to come very often to the cottage at Chiswick. I cannot remember what he was like. I was seldom in the room when he was there. I remember only that my father and he were often together. I have a very strong reason for wishing to know all about that man.'

'I think I know whom you mean. I have heard your poor mother talk of him many a time. She used to tell me all her troubles, and I used

to give her good advice. You say you want particularly to know about this person.'

'Most particularly, dear aunt,' said Laura eagerly.

'Then, my dear, my diary can tell you much better than I can. I am a woman of methodical habits, and ever since my husband's death, three and twenty years ago last August, I have made a point of keeping a record of the course of every day in my life. I dare say the book would seem very stupid to strangers. I hope nobody will publish it after I am dead. But it has been a great pleasure to me to look through the pages from time to time, and call up old days. It is almost like living over again. Kindly take my keys, Laura, and open the right-hand door of the cheffonier.'

Laura obeyed. The interior of the cheffonier was divided into shelves, and on the uppermost of these shelves were neatly arranged three and twenty small volumes, bound in morocco, and lettered Diary, with the date of each year. The parliamentary records at Strawberry Hill are not more carefully kept than the history of Mrs. Malcolm's life.

‘Let me see,’ she said. ‘Your father died in the winter of ’56; your poor mother a few months earlier. Bring me the volume for ’56.’

Laura handed the book to the old lady, who gave a gentle little sigh as she opened it.

‘Dear me, how neatly I wrote in ’56,’ she exclaimed. ‘My handwriting has sadly degenerated since then. We get old, my dear; we grow old without knowing it.’

Laura thought that in that monumental drawing-room age might well creep on unawares. Life there must be a long hybernation.

‘Let me see. I must find some of my conversations with your mother. “June 2. Read prayers. Breakfast. My rasher was cut too thick, and the frying was not up to cook’s usual mark. Mem.: must speak to cook about the bacon. Read a leading article on indirect taxation in *Times*, and felt my store of knowledge increased. Saw cook. Decided on a lamb cutlet for lunch, and a slice of salmon and roast chicken for dinner. Sent for cook five minutes afterwards, and ordered sole instead of salmon. I had salmon the day before

yesterday." Dear me, I don't see your poor mother's name in the first week of June,' said the old lady, turning over the leaves. 'Here it comes, a little later, on the fifteenth. Now you shall hear your mother's own words, faithfully recorded on the day she spoke them. And yet there are people who would ridicule a lonely old woman for keeping a diary,' added Mrs. Malcom, with mild self-approval.

'I feel very grateful to you for having kept one,' said Laura.

'June 15. Stephen brought his wife to lunch with me, by appointment. I ordered a nice little luncheon; filleted sole, cutlets, a duckling, peas, new potatoes, cherry tart, and a custard. The poor woman does not often enjoy a good dinner, and no doubt my luncheon would be her dinner. But my thoughtfulness was thrown away. The poor thing was looking pale and worn when she came, and she hardly ate a morsel. Even the duckling did not tempt her, though she owned it was the first she had seen this year. After luncheon Stephen went to the City, to keep an appointment

as he told us, and his wife and I spent a quiet hour in my drawing-room. We had a long talk, which turned, as usual, on her domestic troubles. She calls this Captain Desmond her husband's evil genius, and says he is a blight upon her life. He is not an old friend of Stephen's, so there is no excuse for that foolish fellow's infatuation. They met him first at Boulogne, last year; and from that time to this he and Stephen have been inseparable. Poor Laura declares that this Desmond belongs to a horrid, gambling, drinking set, and that he is the cause of Stephen's ruin. "We were poor when we first went to Boulogne," she said, with tears in her eyes, poor child, "but we could just manage to live respectably, and for the first year we were very happy. But from the day my husband made the acquaintance of Captain Desmond things began to go badly. Stephen resumed his old habits of billiard playing, cards, and late hours. He had grown fond of his home, and reconciled to a quiet, domestic life. Darling Laura's pretty ways, and sweet little talk amused and interested him. But after Captain Desmond came upon the

scene Stephen seldom spent an evening at home. I know that it is wicked to hate people," the poor thing said, in her simple way, "but I cannot help hating this bad man."'

'Poor mother!' sighed Laura, touched to the heart by this picture of domestic misery.

'I asked her if she knew who and what Captain Desmond was. She could only tell me that when Stephen made his acquaintance he was living at a boarding-house at Boulogne, and had been living there for some months. He had spent a considerable part of his life abroad. He had nobody belonging to him, and he seemed to belong to nobody; though he often boasted vaguely of grand connections. To poor Laura's mind he was nothing more or less than an adventurer. "He flatters my husband," she said, "and he tries to flatter me. He is very often at Chiswick, and whenever he comes he takes my husband back to London with him, and then I see no more of Stephen till the next day, or perhaps not for two or three days after. He has what his friend calls a shake-down at Captain Desmond's lodgings in May's Buildings, St. Martin's Lane."'

‘Aunt,’ exclaimed Laura eagerly, ‘will you let me copy that address. It might be of use to me, if I should have to trace the past life of this man.’

She wrote the address in a little memorandum book contained in her purse.

‘My dear, why should you trouble yourself about Captain Desmond,’ said the old lady. ‘Whatever harm he did your poor father is past and done with. Nothing can alter or mend it now.’

‘No, aunt, but as long as this man lives he will go on doing harm. He will go from small crimes to great ones. It is his nature. Please go on with the diary, dear aunt. You can have no idea how valuable this information is to me.’

‘I have always felt I was doing a useful act in keeping a diary, my dear. I am not surprised to find this humble record of inestimable value,’ said the old lady, who was bursting with gratified vanity. ‘Where would history be if people in easy circumstances, and with plenty of leisure, did not keep diaries? I do not think there is any more about Captain Desmond. No; your mother

tells me about her own health. She is feeling very low and ill. She fears she will not live many years, and then what is to become of poor little Laura?’

‘Did you ever go to Chiswick, aunt?’

‘Never, till after your poor father’s death. I attended his funeral.’

‘Was Captain Desmond present?’

‘No; but he was with your father up to the last hour of his life. I heard that from the landlady. He helped to nurse him.’

‘I thank you, aunt, with all my heart, for what you have told me. I will come and see you again in a few days, if I may.’

‘Do, my dear, and bring your husband.’ Laura shivered. ‘I should like to make his acquaintance. If you will mention the day a little beforehand, I should be pleased for you to take your luncheon with me. I have the cook who roasted that duckling for your poor mother still with me.’

‘I shall be pleased to come, aunt. We are in London upon very serious business, but I hope it

will soon be ended, and when it is over I will tell you all about it.'

'Do, my dear. I am very glad to see you again. I dare-say you remember spending a week with me when your mother died. I think you enjoyed yourself. This house must have been such a change for you after that poor little place at Chiswick, and there is a good deal to amuse a child in this room,' said Mrs. Malcolm, glancing admiringly from the monumental clock on the mantelpiece to the group of feather flowers and stuffed birds on the sepulchral cheffonier.

Laura smiled faintly, remembering those interminable days in that cheerless chamber, compared with which a dirty lane where she could have made mud pies would have been Elysium.

'I've no doubt you were extremely kind to me, aunt,' she said gently, 'but I was very small and very shy.'

'And you did not like going to bed in the dark; which shows that you had been foolishly brought up. Your mother was a sweet woman, but wanting in strength of mind.'

CHAPTER XIV.

THREE WITNESSES.

IN the forenoon of the following Tuesday John Treverton again appeared before the magistrate, at the Police-court in Bow Street.

The same witnesses were present who had been examined on the previous occasion. Two medical men gave their evidence as to the dagger, which had been sent to them for examination. One declared that the blade bore unmistakable traces of blood stains, and gave it as his opinion that steel once so sullied never lost the stain. The other stated that a steel blade wiped quickly while the blood upon it was wet would carry no such ineffaceable mark, and that the tarnished appearance of the dagger was referable only to time and atmosphere.

The inquiry dragged itself haltingly towards a futile close, when just as it seemed about to conclude, an elderly woman, wrapped in a thick gray shawl,

and a cat-skin sable victorine, and further muffled with a Shetland veil tied over a close black bonnet, came forward, escorted by George Gerard, and volunteered her evidence. This was Mrs. Evitt, who was just well enough to crawl from a cab to the witness-box, leaning on the surgeon's arm.

‘Oh,’ said the magistrate, when Jane Sophia Evitt had been duly sworn, ‘you are the landlady, are you? Why were you not here last Tuesday? You were subpoenaed, I believe.’

‘Yes, your worship, though I was not in a state of health to bear it.’

‘Oh, you were too ill to appear, were you? Well, what have you to say about the prisoner?’

‘Please, your worship, he oughtn’t to be a prisoner. I ought to have up and spoke the truth sooner—it has preyed upon me awful that I didn’t do it—a sweet young wife, too.’

‘What is the meaning of this rambling?’ asked the magistrate, indignantly. ‘Is the poor creature delirious?’

‘No, sir, I ain’t more delirious than your worship. My body has been all of a shiver—hot

fits and cold fits—but thank God my mind has kep' clear.'

'You really must not tell us about your ailments. What do you know of the prisoner?'

'Only that he's as innocent as that lamb, yonder,' said Mrs. Evitt, pointing to a baby in the arms of a forlorn looking drab, from the adjacent rookeries of St. Giles's, which had just set up a shrill squall, and was in process of being evicted by a policeman. 'He had no more to do with it than that blessed infant that's just been carried out of court.'

And then, continually beginning to wander, and being continually pulled up sharp by the magistrate, Mrs. Evitt told her ghastly story of the handful of iron-gray hair, and the blood-stained dressing-gown, hidden in the closet behind the bed in her two-pair back.

'Which is there to this day, as the police may find for themselves if they like to go and look,' concluded Mrs. Evitt.

'They will take care to do that,' said the magistrate. 'Where is this Desrolles?'

'He is being looked for, sir,' replied Mr. Leopold. 'If your worship will permit, there are two gentle-

men in court who are in possession of facts that have a material bearing on this case.'

'Let them be sworn.'

The first of these two voluntary witnesses was Mr. Joseph Lemuel, the well-known stockbroker and millionaire, on whose appearance in the witness-box there was a sudden hush in the court, and profound attention from every one, as 'at the presence of greatness.

Even that tag-rag and bob-tail from adjacent St. Giles's had heard of Joseph Lemuel. His name had been in the penny newspapers. He was a man who was supposed to make a million of money every time there was war in Europe, and to lose a million whenever there was a financial crisis.

'Do you know anything of this affair, Mr. Lemuel?' the magistrate asked, with an off-hand friendliness, when the witness had been sworn, as much as to say, 'It is really uncommonly good of you to trouble yourself about a fellow-creature's fate; and I want to make the thing as light and as pleasant as I can, for your sake.'

'I think I may be able to afford a clue to the

motive of the murderer,' said Mr. Lemuel, who seemed more moved than the occasion warranted. 'I presented the unhappy lady with a necklace about a week before her death; and I have reason to fear that this gift may have been the cause of her terrible death!'

'Was the necklace of such value as to tempt a murderer?'

'It was not. But, to an uneducated eye, it appeared of great value. It was a gift which I offered to a lady whose talents I—as one of the outside public—enthusiastically admired.'

'Naturally,' assented the magistrate, as much as to say, 'Don't be frightened, my dear sir. I am not going to ask you any awkward questions.'

'It was a necklace I had bought in Paris, in the Palais Royal, a short time before. It was made by a man who had a speciality for these things. It would perhaps have deceived any eye except that of a diamond merchant, and might indeed have deceived a dealer, if he had judged by the eye alone. I gave fifty pounds for the necklace. It was exquisitely set, and really a work of art.'

‘Did Madame Chicot suppose the stones were real?’

‘I don’t know. I told her nothing about the necklace. It seemed to me a suitable offering to an actress, to whom appearances are as important as realities.’

‘Madame Chicot made no inquiry as to the intrinsic value of your gift?’

‘None. It was offered and accepted in silence.’

‘Is that all you have to say?’

‘That is all.’

The next witness was Mr. Mosheh, the diamond merchant. His evidence consisted of a straight and succinct narrative of his interview with the stranger, who offered for sale a set of imitation diamonds under the impression that he was offering real stones of great value.

‘These crystals were some of them equal in size to the largest diamonds known in the trade,’ said Mr. Mosheh. ‘They would have been a tremendous haul for a thief, if they had been real.’

He gave the date of the man’s visit, which was within a week of La Chicot’s murder.

‘Could you identify the man who called upon you with those stones?’ asked the magistrate.

‘I believe I could.’

‘Was he the prisoner?’

‘Certainly not. He was a man of between fifty and sixty years of age.’

‘Has anybody a photograph of Desrolles?’

Yes, there was a photograph in court. Mrs. Evitt had furnished the police with two, which Desrolles had given her upon different occasions. One was in court, the other had been taken by the detective who was looking for Desrolles.

The photograph was shown to the witness.

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Moshel, ‘I believe that to be the same face. The man who came to me wore a large gray beard. All the lower part of the face was hidden, and the beard made him look older. I conclude that it was a false beard. But to the best of my belief that is the same man. The upper part of the face is very striking. I don’t think I could be deceived in it.’

After this evidence Mr. Leopold urged that there was no ground for any longer detaining John Treverton. The magistrate, after some little discussion, agreed to this, and the prisoner was discharged.

CHAPTER XV.

THE HUNT FOR DESROLLES.

WHEN Desrolles left the village under the shadow of Dartmoor, after bargaining for a handsome annuity, he meant to enter upon a new and delightful stage of existence. The world was changed for him. Assured of a handsome income, he felt as it were, new born. He would rove, butterfly-like, from city to city. He would sip of one sweet, and then fly to the rest. All that was fairest upon earth was at his command. The loveliest spots in southern Europe should be the cradle of his declining years. He would leave off brandy, and live decently. Henceforward he would have a full purse, and freedom from care; for what tortures can conscience have in reserve for a man who has set it at nought all his life?

Mr. Desrolles considered Paris as the first stage in that voyage of pleasure which he had

planned for himself; but once having entered Paris, with money in his pocket, and a sense of independence, all his schemes became as nothing when weighed against the fascinations of that wonderful city. He had spent some of his most reckless years in Paris; he knew the city by heart, with all her charms, with all her vices, all those qualities which she possesses in common with the courtesans who spring from her soil. Paris for Desrolles in his decline had all the delights she had offered him in his youth. She stretched out her many arms to detain and hold him, like an octopus. Her life of the streets and the café, her dancing places—where the dancing began at eleven at night and ended only at some unearthly hour of the morning—her singing places, where bare-necked brazen women sat smiling in the glare of the gas—her wine shops at every corner—her billiard rooms over every café—all these were charms which for Desrolles proved irresistible. There was an all-pervading note of dissipation in the place that delighted him. In London he had felt himself a scamp. In Paris

he fancied himself little worse than his fellow men. There were differences, perhaps; but only differences of degree.

Desrolles had come to Paris with the intention of curing himself of brandy. He carried out this resolve with laudable firmness. He cured himself of brandy by taking to absinthe. He entered Paris with ninety-five pounds in his pocket, and a promise of a thousand a year. With the future so amply provided for, he was naturally somewhat reckless as to his expenditure in the present. He was not a man who cared for pomp or show. He had out-lived his taste for the refinements of life. With his purse full of money he had no inclination to put up at Meurice's, or the Bristol. The elegant luxury of those establishments would have seemed *fada* to his perverted taste, just as brandy without the addition of cayenne pepper used to seem tasteless to a luckless English marquis, who burned life's brief candle at both ends, and brought it to speedy extinction.

Desrolles, like the hare, wound back to his old form. Years ago he had lodged in the

students' quarter, and drunk at the students' cafés, and lost his money among those profane young reprobates from whom were to issue the future senators, doctors, and lawyers of France. The lodging had been dirty and disreputable twenty years ago. It was so much the more dirty and no less disreputable after the lapse of twenty years. But Desrolles was grateful to Providence and the Prefect of the Seine for having left his old quarters standing.

The house, beneath whose weather-worn roof he had spent such wild nights of old, had been spared from demolition by accident only, and was soon to be numbered with the things of the past. Its doom was fixed, it existed only on sufferance, pending the complete reconstruction of the quarter. A mighty Boulevard, marching on with progress as relentless as Juggernaut's car, had cut the narrow, dingy old street across, at right angles, letting daylight in upon all its shabbiness, its teeming life, its contented poverty, its secret crime, squalid miseries, and sordid vices.

The house in which Desrolles had lived had but

just escaped demolition. It stood at the corner of the broad, new Boulevard, where mighty stone palaces were being raised upon the ashes of departed hovels. Its next door neighbour had been razed to the ground, and the gaudy papers that had lined the vanished rooms were revealed to the open day, showing how, stage by stage, the rooms had waxed shabbier, lower, smaller, till on the sixth story they had dwindled to mere pigeon holes. The ragged paper rotted on the wall; black patches showed where the fire-places had stood; and a great black column marked the course of a demolished chimney stack. This outside wall had been shored up, but, even thus supported, the tall narrow, corner house, contemplated from the street below, had an insecure look.

Desrolles was delighted to find his ancient den still standing. How well he remembered the little wine shop on the ground floor, the bright-coloured bottles in the windows, the odour of brandy within, the blouses sitting on the benches, against the wall, squabbling loudly over dominoes, or playing *écarté* with the limpest and smallest of cards.

He inquired in the wine-shop if there was *une chambre de garçon*—a bachelor's room—to be had upstairs.

‘There is always room for a bachelor,’ answered the buxom female behind the counter. ‘Yes, there is a pretty little room on the fifth story, all that there is of the most commodious, *où monsieur aurait toutes ses aises.*’

Desrolles shrugged his shoulders dubiously.

‘The fifth story!’ he exclaimed. ‘Do you think my legs are as young as they were twenty years ago?’

‘Monsieur looks full of youth and activity,’ said the woman.

‘Does La Veuve Chomard still keep the house?’

Alas, no. The widow Chomard had departed some nine years ago to the narrowest of houses in the cemetery of Mount Parnassus. The present proprietor was a gentleman in the commerce of wines, and also the proprietor of the shop.

That made nothing, Desrolles told the woman. All he wanted was a comfortable room on the first or second floor.

Unhappily the *chambrette de garçon* on the fifth stage was the only unoccupied room in the house, and after some hesitation Desrolles followed an ancient female of the portress species up the dirty old staircase, and into the *chambrette*.

‘That gives upon the new boulevard,’ said the portress, opening a small window. ‘*C’est crânement gaie*. It is awfully lively!’

Desrolles looked down upon the broad new street, with its omnibuses, and wagons, and builders’ trollies circulating up and down—its monstrous scaffolding, and lofty ladders, and workmen dangling between earth and sky, with an appearance of being in immediate peril of death.

The room was small, but to Desrolles’ eye it looked snug. There were comfortable stuff curtains to the mahogany bedstead, curtains to the window, a carpet on the red tiled floor, a hearth on which a wood fire might burn cheerily, a cupboard for firewood, and a bureau with a lock and key, in which a man might put away a bottle or two for occasional use.

‘It’s an infernal way up,’ he said. ‘A man

might as well live on the top of the gate of St. Denis. But I must make it serve. I am a staunch Conservative. I like old quarters.'

Of old the house had been free and easy in its habits. A lodger could come in at any hour he liked with his pass key. Desrolles made an inquiry or two of the portress as to the present rule. He found that the old order still obtained. The present proprietor was *un bon enfant*. He asked nothing of his lodgers but that they should pay him his rent, and not embroil themselves with the police.

Desrolles flung down the small valise which contained all his worldly gear, paid the portress a month's rent in advance, and went out to enjoy his Paris. That enchantress had him in her clutch already. He made up his mind by this time that he would defer his journey southward for a few weeks; perhaps until after the procession of the *Bœuf Gras* had delighted the lively inhabitants of the liveliest city in the world

He went back to his old haunts, loved twenty years ago, and always remembered with fondness. He found many changes, but the atmo-

sphere was still the same. Absinthe was the one great novelty. That murderous stimulant had not attained a universal popularity at the beginning of the Second Empire. Desrolles took to absinthe as an infant takes to the gracious fountain heaven has provided for its sustenance. He renounced brandy in favour of the less familiar poison. He found plenty of new companions in his old haunts. They were not the same men, but they had the same habits, the same vices; and Desrolles' idea of a friend was a bundle of sympathetic wickedness. He found men to gamble with and drink with, men whose tongues were as foul as his own, and who looked at life in this world and the next from the same standpoint.

His brutal nature sank even to a lower depth of brutality in such congenial company. Money gave him a temporary omnipotence. He was spending it with royal recklessness, believing himself secure against all future evils, when one morning chance flung an English newspaper in his way, and he read the report of John Treverton's first appearance at the Bow Street Police-court.

The paper was more than a week old. The adjourned inquiry must have been held a day or two ago. Desrolles sat staring at the page in a half stupid wonderment, his brain bemused with absinthe, trying to consider what effect this arrest of John Treverton might exercise upon his own fortunes.

There was no mention of his own name in the report. So far he was entirely ignored. So far he felt himself safe.

Yet there was no knowing what might not happen. An investigation of this kind once commenced, might extend its ramifications in the widest directions.

‘It is a pity,’ Desrolles said to himself. ‘The business was so comfortably settled. It must be the parson’s son, that young coxcomb I saw in Devonshire, who has set the thing moving again.’

His life in Paris suited him, it was indeed the only kind of life he cared for; yet so much was he disturbed by the idea of possible revelations to which this new inquiry might lead, that he began to consider the prudence of going further a-field.

‘America is the place,’ he said to himself.

‘Some sea-coast city in South America would suit me down to the ground. But that kind of life would only be comfortable with an assured income; and how am I to feel secure of my income if I leave Europe? As to Treverton being in trouble—I can afford to take that coolly. They can’t hang him. The evidence against him is not strong enough to hang a mongrel dog. No, unless other names are brought up, the thing must blow over. But if I put the high seas between Mr. and Mrs. Treverton and me, how can I be sure of my pension? They may snap their fingers at me when I am on the other side of the herring-pond.’

This was a serious consideration, yet Desrolles had a lurking conviction that it would be wise for him to get to America as soon as he could. Paris might suit him admirably, but Paris was unpleasantly near London. The police of the two cities were doubtless in frequent communication.

He went to a shipping office, and got the time bill of the American steamers that were to sail from Havre during the next six weeks. He carried this document about with him for two or three days,

and studied it frequently in his quiet moments. He knew the names of the steamers and their tonnage by heart, but he had not yet made up his mind to which vessel he would entrust himself and his fortunes. There was *La Reine Blanche*, which sailed for Valparaiso in a week's time. There was the *Zenobie*, which sailed for Rio Janeiro in a fortnight. He was divided between these two.

He told himself that he must have an outfit of some kind for his voyage. This and his passage would cost at least fifty pounds. Of the hundred which John Treverton had given him he had only sixty remaining.

‘There will not be much left by the time I get to the south,’ he said to himself. ‘But I don’t think Laura will throw me over. Besides, if the money is paid to my account in Shepherd’s Inn, the Trevertons need never know my whereabouts.’

He made up his mind at last that he would go by the *Reine Blanche*, the ship which sailed earliest. He went to the Belle Jardinière, and laid out ten pounds upon clothing, and bought himself a portmanteau to hold his new garments.

He called at the agents to take his passage and pay the necessary deposit, to secure his berth.

He had intended to go to the New World with a new name, but exhausted nature had required a good deal of stimulant after the purchase of the outfit, and by the time he reached the office Mr. Desrolles was, in his own phraseology, rather far gone. It was as much as he could do to reckon his money when he took a handful of loose gold and silver from his pocket. The clerk had to help him. When the clerk asked him his name, he answered without thinking—Desrolles; but in the next moment a ray of light flashed through the darkness of his clouded brain, and he corrected himself.

‘Beg pardon,’ he ejaculated, spasmodically. ‘Desrolles a friend’s name. My name’s Mowbray. Colonel Mowbray, citizen, United States. Just finished a grand tour of Europe. ‘Mericans very fond of Paris. Charming city. Good deal altered since my last tour—twent’ years ago. Not altered for the better.’

‘Oh, then your name is not Desrolles, but

Mowbray,' said the clerk, scanning the American colonel somewhat suspiciously.

'Yes, Mowbray. M-o-w-b-r-a-y,' answered Desrolles, laboriously.

He left the office, and being too far gone to have any definite views as to his destination, drifted vaguely to the Palais Royal, where he came to anchor at the Café de la Rotonde, and there called for the usual dose of absinthe, into which he poured half a tumbler of water, with a tremulous hand.

He fell asleep in the snug corner by the stove, and slept off something of his intoxication; or at least he awoke so far refreshed as to remember an appointment he had made with one of his new friends of the Quartier Latin, to dine at a restaurant on the Quai des Grands Augustins.

He had plenty of time to spare, so he sauntered round the Palais Royal, and stared idly at the shop windows, till he came to one where there was a great display of diamonds, when he recoiled as if he had seen an adder, and turned quickly aside into the gravelly garden, where he flung himself upon a bench, trembling from head to

foot. 'Curse them,' he muttered, 'curse those shining shams. They have ruined me body and soul. I never took to drinking——hard——until after that.'

Beads of sweat broke out upon his contracted brow as he sat there, staring straight before him, as if at some horrid vision. Then he pulled himself together with an effort, braced his shattered nerves, and left the Palais Royal with something of the old 'long sword, saddle, bridle' swagger, which had been peculiar to him twenty years ago, when he called himself Captain Desmond, and had not yet forgotten his youthful days in a cavalry regiment.

He kept his appointment, treated his new friend like a prince, dined luxuriously, and drank deeply of the strongest Burgundy in the wine list, winding up with numerous glasses of Chartreuse. After dinner Mr. Desrolles and his guest repaired to a café on the Boulevard St. Michel, where there was a billiard-table; and the rest of the evening was devoted to billiards, Desrolles growing noisier, more quarrelsome, and less distinct of utterance as the night wore on.

There were two things which Mr. Desrolles did not know; first, that his new friend was a distinguished member of the Parisian swell-mob, and was constantly under the surveillance of the police; secondly, that he himself had been watched and followed by an English detective ever since he left the Quai des Grands Augustins, which English detective knew all about Mr. Desrolles' intended voyage in the Reine Blanche.

Desrolles went home to his lodging, not too steady of foot, soon after midnight. He was prepared to encounter some slight difficulty in opening the door with his pass-key, and was pleased at finding that some other night-bird, returning to his nest a little earlier, had left the door ajar. He had only to push it open and go in.

Within all was gloom, save in one corner by the portress's den, where a glimmer of gas showed the numbered board whereon hung the keys which admitted the lodgers to their several apartments. But Desrolles knew every twist of the corkscrew staircase. Drunk as he was, he wound his way up safely enough, with only an

occasional lurch and an occasional stumble. He managed to unlock the door of his room, after trying the key upside down once or twice, and making some circuitous scratchings on the panel. He managed to strike a lucifer and light his candle, leaning against the mantel-piece as he performed that feat, and giving a drunken chuckle when it was done. But his nerves must have been in a very shaky condition, for when a man, who had crept softly into the room behind him, laid a strong hand upon his shoulder, he collapsed, and made as if he would have fallen to the ground. 'What do you want?' he asked in French.

'You,' answered the intruder in English. 'I arrest you on suspicion of being concerned in the murder of La Chicot. You know all about it. You were examined at the inquest. Anything you say now will be used as evidence against you. You had better come quietly with me.'

'I don't understand you,' said Desrolles, still in French. 'I am a Frenchman.'

'Oh, very much of that. You've been lodging here three weeks. You are known to be an English-

man. You took your passage to-day for Valparaiso. I called at the office to make inquiries an hour after you left it. No nonsense, Mr. Desrolles. All you've got to do is to come quietly with me.'

'You've got some one else outside, I suppose,' said Desrolles, with a savage glare at the door.

His expression in this moment was diabolical; a wild beast—a beast of a low type, not your kingly lion or your lordly tiger—at bay and knowing escape impossible, might so look; the thin lips curling upward above the long sharks' teeth; the grizzled brows contracted—the eyes emitting sparks of lurid light.

'Of course,' answered the man, coolly. 'You don't suppose I should be such a fool as to trust myself in a hole like this without help. I've got my mate on the landing, and we've both got revolvers. Ah, none of that, now,' ejaculated the detective suddenly, as Desrolles plunged his lean hand into his breast pocket. 'Stow that, now. Is it a knife?'

It was a knife, and a murderous one. Desrolles had it out, and the long-pointed blade ready, before

his captor could stop him. The man sprang upon him, caught him by the waist, before the knife could do mischief; and then the two closed, hand against hand, limb against limb, Desrolles wrestling with his foe as only rage and despair can wrestle.

He had been a famous bruiser in days of old. To-night he had the unnatural strength given to the overtaken sinews by a mind on the edge of madness. He fought like a madman: he fought like a tiger. There was not a muscle—not a sinew—that was not strained to its utmost in that savage conflict.

For some moments Desrolles seemed the victor. The detective had lied when he said that he had help at hand. The French policeman who had planned to meet him at that house at midnight had not yet come, and the Englishman had been too impatient to wait, believing himself and his revolver more than a match for one drunken old man.

He did not want to use his revolver. It would have been a hazardous thing even to wound his man. It was his duty to take him alive, and

surrender him safe and sound to be dealt with by the law of his country.

‘Come,’ he said, soothingly, having hardly enough breath for so much speech, ‘let me put the bracelets on and take you away quietly. What’s the use of this humbug?’

Desrolles, with his teeth set, answered never a word. He had got his antagonist very near the door; once across the threshold, a last vigorous thrust from his lean arms might hurl the man backwards down the steep staircase—certain death to the intruder. Desrolles’ eyes were fixed upon the doorway, the door standing conveniently open. His blood-shot eyeballs flashed fire. It was in his mind that the thing was to be done. One more herculean effort, and his foe would be across the threshold.

Possibly the detective saw that look of triumph in the savage face, and divined his danger. However that might be, he gathered himself together, and with a sudden impetus, flinging all his weight against Desrolles, he drove his foe before him across the narrow room, hurled him with all his might

against the wall, casting him loose for the moment in order to grip him tighter afterwards.

But as that tall figure fell with terrific force against the gaudy-papered wall, there was a sudden crashing sound, at which the detective recoiled with a cry of horror. The frail lath and plaster partition split asunder, the rotten wood crumbled and scattered itself in a cloud of dust, half that side of the room dropped into ruin, as if the house had been a house of cards, and, with one hoarse shriek, Desrolles rolled backwards into empty air.

They found him presently upon the pavement below, so battered and disfigured by that awful fall as to be hardly recognizable even by the eyes that had looked upon him a few minutes before. In falling he had struck against the timbers that shored up the rotten old house, and life had been beaten out of him before he touched the stones below. It was a bad end of a bad man. There was nobody to be sorry for him, except the detective, who had lost the chance of a handsome reward.

The Parisian journals next day made a feature

of the catastrophe. 'Fall of part of a house in the Boulevard Louis Capet. Horrible death of one of the inmates.'

The English newspapers of a later date contained the account of the pursuit and arrest of Desrolles, his desperate resistance, and awful death.

EPILOGUE.

MR. and Mrs. Treverton went back to Hazlehurst Manor, and there was much rejoicing among their friends at John Treverton's escape from the critical position in which the hazards of life had placed him. The subject was a painful one, and people, in their intercourse with John and Laura, touched upon it as lightly as possible. Those revelations about John Treverton's first marriage, his Bohemian existence under an assumed name, his poverty, and so on, had created no small sensation among a community which rarely had anything more exciting to talk about than the state of the weather, or the appearance of the crops. People had talked their fill by the time Mr. and Mrs. Treverton came back, for they had spent a month at a Dorsetshire watering-place on their way home, for the benefit of Laura's health, whereby the scandal was stale and almost

worn threadbare when they arrived at the Manor House.

Only one event of any importance had happened during their absence. Edward Clare—the poet, the man who sauntered through life hand-in-hand with the muses, dwelling apart from common clay in a world of his own—had suddenly sickened of elegant leisure, and had started all at once for the Cape to learn ostrich farming, with the deliberate intention of settling for life in that distant land.

‘An adventurous career will suit me, and I shall make money,’ he told those few acquaintances to whom he condescended to explain his views. ‘My people are tired of seeing me lead an idle life. They have no faith in my future as a poet. Perhaps they are right. The rarest and finest of poets have made very little money. It is only charlatanism in literature that really pays. A man who can write down to the level of the herd commands an easy success. Herrick, if he were alive to-day, would not make a living by his pen.

So Edward Clare departed from the haunts of

his youth, and there was no one save his mother to regret him. The Vicar knew too well that John Treverton's arrest was his son's work, and treachery so base was a sin his honest heart could not forgive. He was glad that Edward had gone, and his secret prayer was that the young man might learn honesty as well as industry in his self-imposed exile.

To the exile himself anything was better than to see the man he had impotently striven to injure, happy and secure from all future malice. Weighed against that mortification the possible difficulties and hardships of the life to which he was going were as nothing to him.

The year wore on, and brought a new and strange gladness and a deep sense of responsibility to John Treverton. One balmy May morning his first-born son opened his innocent blue eyes upon a bright young world, arrayed in all the glory of spring. The child was placed in his father's arms by the good old Hazlehurst doctor, who had attended Jasper Treverton in his last illness.

‘How proud my old friend would have been to

see his family name in a fair way of being continued in the land for many a long year to come,' he said.

'Thank God all things have worked round well for us, at last,' answered John Treverton, gravely.

In the ripeness and splendour of August and harvest, when the heather was in bloom on the rolling moor, and the narrow streams were dried up by the fierceness of the sun, George Gerard came down to the Manor House to spend a brief holiday; and it happened, by a strange coincidence, that Laura had invited Celia Clare to stay with her at the same time. They all had a pleasant time in the peerless summer weather. There were picnics and excursions across the moor, with much exciting adventure, and some risk of losing oneself altogether in that sparsely populated world; and in all these adventures George and Celia had a knack of finding themselves abandoned by the other two—or perhaps it was they who went astray, though they always protested that it was Mr. and Mrs. Treverton who deserted them.

'I shouldn't wonder if we came to a bad end, like the babes in the wood,' protested Celia.

‘Imagine us existing on unripe blackberries for a week or so, and then lying resignedly down to die. I don’t believe a bit in the birds putting leaves over us. That’s a fable invented for the pantomime. Birds are a great deal too selfish. No one who had ever seen a pair of robins fight for a bit of bread would believe in those benevolent birds who buried the babes in the wood.’

Being occasionally lost on the moor gave Celia and Mr. Gerard great opportunities for conversation. They were obliged to find something to talk about; and in the end naturally told each other their inmost thoughts. And so it came about, in the most natural way in the world, that one blazing noontide Celia found herself standing before a Druidic table, gazing idly at the big gray stones half embedded in heather and bracken, with George Gerard’s arm round her waist, and with her head placidly resting against his shoulder.

He had been asking her if she would wait for him. That was all. He had not asked her if she loved him, having made up his own mind upon that question, unassisted.

‘Darling, will you wait for me?’ he asked, looking down at her, with eyes brimming over with love.

‘Yes, George,’ she answered, meekly, quite a transformed Celia, all her pertness and flippancy gone.

‘It may be a long while, dear,’ he said, gravely; ‘almost as long as Rachel waited for Jacob.’

‘I don’t mind that, provided there is no Leah to come between us.’

‘There shall be no Leah.’

So they were engaged, and, in the dim cloudland of the future, Celia saw a vision of Harley Street, a landau, and a pair of handsome grays.

‘Doctors generally have grays, don’t they, George?’ she asked, presently, *apropos* to nothing particular.’

George’s thoughts had not travelled so far as the carriage and pair stage of his existence, and he did not understand the question.

‘Yes, dear, there is a Free Hospital in the Gray’s Inn Road,’ he answered, simply, ‘but I was at Bartlemy’s.’

‘Oh, you foolish George, I was thinking of horses, not hospitals. What colour shall you choose when you start your carriage?’

‘We’ll talk it over, dearest, when we are going to start the carriage.

Mr. and Mrs. Treverton heard of the engagement with infinite pleasure, nor did the Vicar or his easy-tempered wife offer any objection.

Before the first year of Celia’s betrothal was over, John Treverton had persuaded the good old village doctor to retire, and to accept a handsome price for his comfortable practice, which covered a district of sixty miles circumference, and offered ample work for an energetic young man. This practice John Treverton gave to George Gerard as a free gift.

‘Don’t consider it a favour,’ he said, when the surgeon wanted it to be treated as a debt, to be paid out of his future earnings. ‘The obligation is all on my side. I want a clever young doctor, whom I know and esteem, instead of any charlatan who might happen to succeed our old friend. The advantage is all on my side. You will help me in all my sanitary improvements, and my nursery will be safe in the inevitable season of measles and scarlatina.’

Thus it came to pass that Celia, as well as Johu Treverton and his wife, was able to say,

‘But in some wise all things wear round betimes,
And wind up well.’

THE END.

